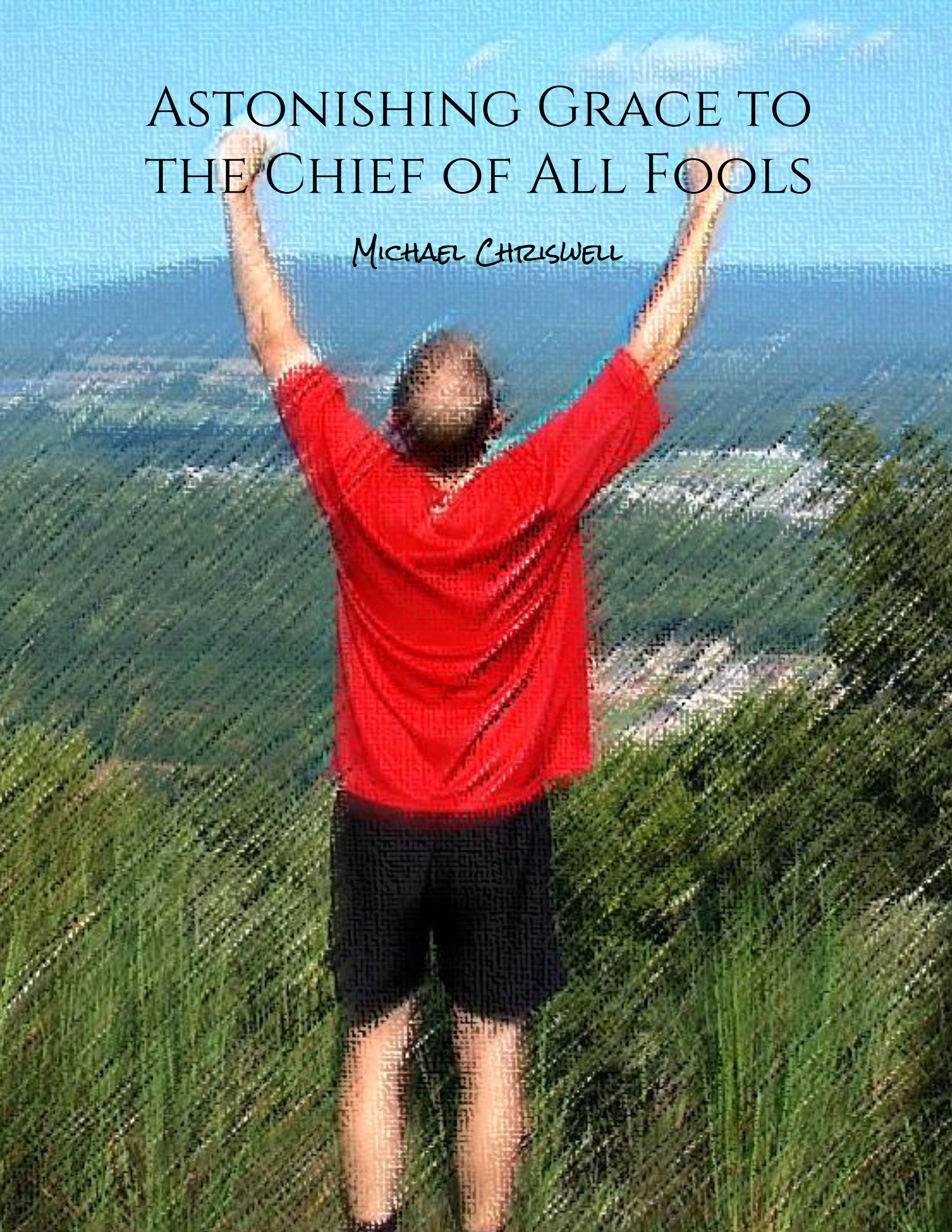


ASTONISHING GRACE TO THE CHIEF OF ALL FOOLS

MICHAEL CHRISWELL



My Dearest Abba, I am frustrated that I cannot express in words my deepest gratitude and love for what you have done in and through my life. I brought you nothing but my desire, smothered in weakness and ignorance, and you gave me light and life through the Lord Jesus Christ. I prayed to you countless times in those woods, *“Father, please give me a story that brings you glory so men will believe you.”* Oh, how wonderfully you have answered those prayers above all that I could think, ask, or possibly imagine. Now, I only ask for your forgiveness for the times I fretted in my mind and shrunk back or delayed from fully proclaiming your marvelous deeds in my life because I was afraid of being misunderstood, or of being accused by men of trying to honor myself. Now my Father, may it be to me as you promised long ago, that your name would be feared and praised at the telling of these stories of your power and faithfulness to the heart of a weakling.

- In the name of our precious Lord Jesus Christ, Thank you forever, I love you forever, and Amen.

*Mark 5:18-20 "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were **amazed**.*

Preface

Romans 15:17-19 Therefore in Christ Jesus I have found reason for boasting in things pertaining to God. For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed, in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit;

It was a Sunday morning in early 2001, at Northland Community church in Longwood, FL, where I was about to have a very bizarre experience. My first wife and I had just opened our franchise of the Lord's Gym health club in Orlando, FL. I was so blessed by all that the Lord had done to make this happen. Both the club and we as the owners, had been received with wonderful enthusiasm by the community.

We were just finishing up the worship service and the sermon was about to begin when I was tapped on my left shoulder. I turned my head as far left as possible, still only able to see the lady from my peripheral vision in the dimly lit sanctuary. She leaned in and said, "*The Lord will be magnified and glorified through your obedience.*" Those were the only words she said; I was stunned. I sat down and went through feelings of wonder, joy, and then even some indignation. At one point I thought, "*Who says something like that to a complete stranger... she doesn't even know me...why would she say that?*" I was barely able to listen to the sermon because I was so struck by her words. I couldn't wait for the service to end so I could inquire of her motive. When the message ended, I promptly turned around and saw a family sitting in all the seats. There were no other empty seats and no one had seen the woman I had just described.

Hebrews 1:14, 13:2 "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation? Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it."

Three months later on May 22nd 2002, at the age of 28 years old, the entire thing collapsed in a very tragic and public scandal. The story ran each night on the evening news with me being slandered in front of hundreds of thousands in Central Florida. The dream was shattered and were left with some half-a-million dollars in business debt. I was so humiliated and afraid that we wouldn't go to a grocery store within 5 miles of my home for at least six months. I had failed terribly in a business with the Lord's name on it, bringing much disgrace to His name. Reflecting back on the words of that woman, **I remember thinking how in the world will God ever be magnified and glorified through my life now...I'm finished!**

Fifteen years later in 2017, despite years of failure, brokenness, and spiritual ignorance on my part, that woman/angel's words have indeed come true. God has redeemed it all and magnified and glorified himself much through my life. As I write this, without depending on any man for help and without doing anything to promote myself or the ministry, I currently have tens of thousands of subscribers on YouTube and several million video views. I receive incredible testimonials from around the world to the praise of the Lord Jesus Christ. Father is using RelentlessHeart.com, the [John 7:17 Challenge](#), and my [YouTube Channel](#) to impact people's lives in transformative ways for Christ all over the world. The stories coming in are often so amazing that perhaps they one day need their own book, but let me share just a few examples here.

There are stories like Kim, a 70-year-old man sitting in his RV, so lonely and discouraged about his faith and life that he found himself for the third time sitting with a 357-magnum pointed under his chin.

December 31st, 2016

My name is Kim John Curtis and I'm 70 yrs old. I was listening to one of your videos only because I opened the page **by mistake**, on YouTube. I was sitting here in my RV with a 357 mag in my hand and aimed right under my chin. I am not sure what actually happened but the gun went off and fell to the floor. I just sort of sat there wondering why my eyes were still open and I could still hear your video. I couldn't figure out what went wrong, I'm a good shot, and at close range how could I miss?

Kim had been a professing Christian for 17 years. He had attended three different churches and had been kicked out of all three after questioning what he called the greasy grace teaching. He continues...

I gave up on God, Jesus, and reading the bible. I went back to my old lifestyle of booze, pot, cussing, but never cursed God. I didn't chase women but I did pursue porno and masturbation. I had and still have an intense hatred of those people. After all they are Gods chosen righteous people, aren't they? I can't say that I hated God or Jesus, I just hated his chosen people. It has taken me about four months to get to where I am now. Even 48 hrs. from Bang! Ooops.. Missed, I still hate them mostly because they have convinced me that I am evil, no good, and unsalvageable.

When I read his email, I knew the Lord was after Kim. I sent him a few personal recordings to encourage him and answered a few questions he had and then directed him to take the [John 7:17 Challenge](#). The [John 7:17 Challenge](#) is a step-by-step discipleship journey to help people experience God and find Life to the Full. It is a 90-day hand-held journey through the top 90 actionable teachings of Jesus Christ. The Challenge is available in a printed workbook, or it may be read and taken all online for *free* at [RelentlessHeart.com](#) or the John 7:17 Playlist on my [YouTube channel](#).

Kim started taking the Challenge and within just a few weeks of him starting, I received this beautiful and glorious email from the very man who had pulled the trigger to end his life just five weeks earlier. God is to be praised!

February 10th 2017

Hi Mike, I am really grateful for the book. I thank the Lord that he has given you such a terrific insight. Things are improving and I am very sensitive to the Holy Spirit now. It is not an emotional high, it is more like coming up for air after diving deep in the ocean. You know like when you aren't sure you're going to make it to the surface. And then you burst through and gasp for air. Suddenly you know you are going to be OK and you just float there sucking in air and then you relax for a few heartbeats and then you start swimming for shore. This may sound silly but I find myself reading the Psalms and then Later in the day I just close my eyes and make up my own Psalms and it's like I can feel the heart of David as he prayed, praised and sang his own Psalms. All I know is that I don't want to stop and I know that there is the presence of the Holy Spirit all around me. I feel, I guess the word is INVOLVED. Not the

spectator sense you get when just listening to some preacher or even music. This is well almost indescribable. All I know is peace and security and a real appetite for the red letters!!!!!!

As I was editing this part of the book, I sent Kim another email to check on him and ask Him if he was still clinging to the Lord. I received the following reply, not from Kim, but clearly from the HOLY SPIRIT who is now alive and well inside of Him. Hallelujah!

July 22nd 2017

YES !!!!!. Things have changed for me so entirely that I can hardly keep up with them. I'm not getting rich or famous. I'm not getting younger and handsomer. I am getting free of my past and free to explore each day in the wonderment, the strength, and assurance that is in Jesus. I have been freed from the condemnation I have always felt because I knew religion but not JESUS. The Holy Spirit is reshaping my heart, my mind, and even my body. I am stronger and healthier. I have an insatiable hunger for truth that only found in prayer and worship or praise. A relationship with Jesus is NOT about US. It is about Jesus. Obedience, that is our obedience to His Word, is our true expression of love for Him and gratitude for what He has done for us. "If you love me you will obey me. If you keep my words and obey me, then truly you are MY disciples."

How? Feed the poor. Visit and care for the sick, entreat and care for the widows and orphaned. In other words, do what He did. Do His works. It's not "What would Jesus do; but what DID He do? I believe that this is how we demonstrate our LOVE for Jesus. Seek His face instead of His hand. Our blessing is a closer relationship with Him and eventually eternal life.

I want to thank you for all the work you have done, and your steadfast obedience to Jesus. Because of your obedience and work, I am walking in faith in what Jesus has done for me. I am on the road to eternal life. I now know Love, true love and I am able to share that love with others. There are so many others out there just like me and you have the ministry and vehicle to reach them. I don't know how many other hurting hearts and souls are out here that will receive your message, but if it is only just one like me, then you must keep going on. I believe in my heart of hearts that a crown awaits its place on your head. Please be welcome to my testimony and use it as you will. I love you in the Lord and I praise God that He brought me to your video on that day. It saved my Life and restored my soul. YAHOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO-SHUAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!!!!!!!

Oh, how amazing is our loving heavenly Father! I wish I could tell you all the stories because they are just so incredible. There's the story from the young man in Ireland who was engaged and had two children with his fiancé. He had gambled away 60,000 pounds which was all the money he needed for his marriage and their life together. He lost all hope and wrote his suicide note while sitting in his car. Before he got to the place where he was going to kill himself, he came across my story video "Trusting God in the Storm" and found hope in Christ. Six months later he sent me the pictures of he and his beautiful bride on their wedding day. I told him how impossible it was for me to try to imagine him not being in the picture and I just praised God.

There are local stories of women like Kay an office cleaning lady, or Mary a music teacher, who I've had divine "forgiveness" encounters with. Mary, in her late 50's, was sitting outside of a Starbucks when I said

hello. Filled with pain and anger from the long-term abuse of a pastor, she was just days away from filing a very public lawsuit. She had met with the attorney that morning and was convinced this was the right thing to do. God did a miracle, and in one moment as I led her through the words of Christ on forgiveness, and into a prayer of forgiveness towards the pastor from her heart, she stepped into total freedom. She came up from the prayer an entirely different person, literally exclaiming, *"I'm free Michael...I'm free...I've never felt this weightless in my life...I never knew I could get to this place"*. For the next several years Mary was floating each time I ran into her at Starbucks.

The story of Kay, the commercial cleaning lady is almost identical. I saw Kay cleaning the office building I was actually living homeless in for four months (more on this story later) and I discerned something was wrong. She opened up about her two sisters having stolen everything from her mother's will and leaving her out. Her heart was filled with hate for them. Her life was changed in a moment of God's grace and freedom, as she too agreed to obey the teachings of Christ on forgiveness. I led her through the prayer while she was shaking like a leaf. She came up sobbing in tears as a completely different woman, taking the biggest freshest breath of her life and giving me a huge hug. Two weeks later, she came running in, *"Michael, Michael...I helped someone else get free just like you helped me to get free...she was changed in an instant."* There is power in the kingdom of God to change lives.

There's the story of the brother in Mexico who watched my videos and became so convicted by the Holy Spirit that he decided to sell his Tattoo business and give up all for Jesus. There's Mansan, the Christian businessman in India who had been struggling in his walk and business with Christ for years, never experiencing the joy and peace of the Lord. Upon finding my videos and emailing me, He surrendered everything risking it all for the Lord. One year after his surrender and a journey through the John 7:17 Challenge, he wrote to me about the peace of Christ in his heart and the miracles he had seen in his life and business since and how very thankful he had been for my obedience to Christ.

There are stories of men and women finally leaving abusive unfaithful spouses who violently opposed their faith in Christ for years, people leaving watered down churches and false teaching who are now experiencing personal revival, people giving up ungodly careers, ungodly relationships, getting free from sins that had enslaved them for years, waiting patiently for God to act in their life, abandoning their will for God's, starting ministries of their own, incredible stories of forgiveness, and countless believers finally discovering *life to the full* in Christ.

God is doing miracle after miracle in the hearts of His chosen children through this tiny little one man ministry, even changing hardened hearts and opening the eyes of the spiritually blind and leading them into the light. This is an email I received *just last night* as a timely example.

Name: Margaret Easey
Email Address: [REDACTED]
Subject: One more thing

Message: You might have seen my name written all over your videos in the comments because I hated you and what you had to say. It was so much truth and light at times that I had to call you a deceiver because I didn't want to hear it. But there was a part of me that did and I kept listening and now I see I need to free fall and let go of all my life by His grace.

I see now it is the only way it can be done. In a small way thank you because this is a big step for me.

Father God is indeed being magnified and glorified through the once chief of all *fools*, Michael Chriswell. He has done far too much for me to be able to tell it all, but in this book I want to share the astonishing story and the main events of how it all happened through God's astonishing grace. May God bless you as you read!

Psalm 67:7 God will bless us, and all the ends of the earth will fear him.

Psalm 40:3 He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the LORD.

Psalm 66:16 Come and listen, all you who fear God; let me tell you what he has done for me.

Psalm 75:1 We give thanks to you, O God, we give thanks, for your Name is near; men tell of your wonderful deeds.

Author's *Many* Notes

I did not make this book available online for free because I had to, or because no one would buy it. Clearly, there are thousands now who would gladly pay for this book, allowing me to reap a material harvest for sowing spiritual seed among them (1 Cor 9:12). God willing, I would like to see this in a printed book format one day, which could be held in the hands, but the book will always be available online for free.

I make it available for free for the same reason I made the John 7:17 Challenge available for free, both in text and audio, in three different ways and two different places. I do not want money to prevent someone from hearing the truth, either by their lack of it, or by their weak conscience which causes them to think anytime a Christian writes a book, the motive is money. While ministers of the gospel have this right (See 1 Cor 9), many do misuse this right in their love of money. My life has already proven before God and men, to be a sacrificial life which is free from the love of money. Therefore, my intent is to join Paul in preventing anything from being a stumbling block to you my reader. I wish to silence those who look so desperately for a good excuse to not listen to the truth, or to turn others from it, simply by making it free. I truly understand now why Paul said what he did in 1 Corinthians 9:15, about him desiring to die before he would desire to give up this boast.

However, historically men do not value what is free. I cannot convince you of the value of this book, until you read it, but perhaps if you could see how many devils, even now, are fighting against me to not finish this book, you would indeed find a great perceived value. Please accept this by faith and rest assured, that not only did I pay a hefty spiritual price to live this story and then to write it, but you also will pay a spiritual price to read it and to follow my example as I follow the Lord Jesus Christ. However, if you are willing to pay this cost, you are also willing to receive God's very best spiritual treasures and glory in your life!

Please forgive my style, length and format in this book. I am not at all a gifted writer or editor and this should *not* be read as, or considered as traditionally published book. Father has asked me to tell what He has done in my life. I cannot allow my weaknesses in writing to hinder the glory due our Father nor a traditionally acceptable word count. Instead, I just ask you to give me the freedom to sit down and talk to you as my friend, from my heart, on paper. I want to be Spirit led, not book format or publisher led.

Lord willing, this story will be to the great encouragement and faith strengthening of true brothers and sisters in Christ, who perhaps discover more about the Father's ways and His loving but often mysterious and painful dealings in their own life. My hope is to showcase the principles in His Word, as reflected in my life. I want you to desire and receive more of God's astonishing grace in your own life.

Every single thing you need in order to become a spiritually abundant follower of Christ comes down to one thing, grace. If you are looking and living like Jesus right now, it is because you have grace. If you are not looking and living like Jesus it is because you do not have grace. You will look and live like Jesus in direct proportion to the grace He has given you. This entire story is about how I found and received this abundance of God's amazing and indescribable grace in my life, and then in my ministry.

2 Peter 1:3 His divine power [grace] has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

2 Corinthians 9:8 And God is able to make all grace [power] abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

My friend, these two wonderful promises from God, which I have taken possession of, are waiting to be claimed by *you* through faith and patience. Notice the first promise deals with personal grace and the second promise deals with the grace needed to be a fruitful worker for Christ. We truly cannot do anything apart from His grace (John 15:5).

The way I see it, there are two types of God's grace (or undeserved power) that can be administered in the life of a believer in Jesus Christ, external grace and internal grace. An example of external grace is me driving down I-75 in February of 2012, coming back from my divorce trial in Orlando, Florida, yelling into my voice recorder, "*Oh, my goodness...I cannot believe it...this is freaking me out God!!!*" He showed me the number 777 *sixteen* times that day and was showing me in advance that my divorce crisis would miraculously end on the 777th day after my ex-wife had filed for it.

Exodus 14:31, 15:11 – Deu 4:35 "And when the Israelites saw the great power the LORD displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD and put their trust in Him." Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you---majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders? You were shown these things so that you might know that the LORD is God; besides him there is no other.

Then there is internal grace where you can hear me exclaiming in other recordings, "*I cannot believe how much my heart has changed Father...this is incredible...I am a totally different person.*" These graces can also be thought of us as visible and invisible grace. For Jesus Christ to heal a blind man of his physical sight is external visible grace. For Jesus Christ to heal that same man of his spiritual blindness is internal invisible grace.

To me, the internal grace, albeit less exciting and less provable to others is the most important for several reasons. First, the devil can counterfeit much of God's external grace (2 Thes 2:9-12). He can heal and can do wondrous supernatural signs and miracles. He can bring people, careers, and material possessions into your life and he can even counterfeit the fruits of the Spirit. But, the one thing he cannot bring, which is the highest blessing of the New Covenant, is the holiness and the peace and rest of the living God into your heart by the Holy Spirit. He cannot counterfeit that internal grace of the heart which conforms a man or woman into the image and character of Jesus Christ. He cannot counterfeit fullness in Christ which gives you a victory over the world, yourself, and him. All Christians are supposed to attain to the full measure of Christ.

*Eph 3:19 I pray that you may have power to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the **fullness of God**. Eph 4:13 - until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, **attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ**.*

The second reason that internal grace is superior is the reason why I do not like all these supernatural healing documentaries that are being made and shown on Netflix where people go out on the street and heal people. Persis and I watched a movie called HOLY GHOST and I got so upset watching it. I don't recall seeing anywhere in this movie where *any* of these people being healed or given words of knowledge were told about their sin or the need for repentance.

One rich lady was given a word about her wounded childhood and she was moved to tears at a bar, but Jesus did not come to save people from their troubled childhoods. He came to save them from their troublesome sins against God. This lady was being emotionally moved and led by a false gospel. I can practically guarantee you she walked away from that encounter feeling God had touched her and now she was good with God to go on and continue living her rich life.

Without the preaching of sin and repentance there is *no true* Gospel and no true Jesus. Not only that, but I never heard anyone mention obedience to the commands of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is by far the most important and neglected part of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:20. If I led someone to the Lord today in this coffee shop, there is no way I could leave them without telling them the importance of repentance and obedience to the words of Christ. That's the only way I could be assured they have a chance of really knowing Him and really being saved. If I spoke less than the full gospel, I rob them of eternal life no matter how Charismatic I might be or what word of knowledge I might have given them.

In the film Holy Ghost, you get the impression that if someone can tell you something vague about your past life, or if you get a physical healing or tingling sensation in your body when they hold on to you yelling, "*more Lord...more Lord...more power Lord...more Lord...more Lord*", then you are instantly a part of God's family and saved for eternity. I am sorry, but this is spiritual insanity!

How was the Gospel preached to people in the early church? The first public words about the Gospel from John the Baptist, Jesus Christ, and Peter and Paul after Pentecost all call for repentance from sin.

John Baptist - Mat 3:1-2 In those days John the Baptist came, preaching, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

Jesus - Mar 1:15 "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

Peter - Act 2:38 "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins."

Paul - Act 26:20 I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.

Now look what Paul warned us about regarding sharing the Gospel.

Gal 1:8-9 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! (9) As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!

If a person is healed externally in the name of Jesus Christ or begins to believe because you gave him a "word", but he is left internally and spiritually sick because he never heard the true Gospel, what good will come from this at the end of his life? How many people have fallen over at a Benny Hinn miracle conference under the supposed great power of the Holy Spirit, and yet upon returning home they continue falling over powerlessly into their same old sins? We need power for living up to the righteousness of Christ, not for falling down at some meeting. From this we can see why the person who preaches a false gospel is headed to eternal condemnation. By doing so, they have robbed countless others of eternal life in Christ.

A person with internal grace in the heart, who has little or no external visible grace in their life, is far better off than the person who has external grace, but who doesn't have the internal power to change their heart. Being healed of sin is far more important than being healed of physical sickness. Most believers have this reversed and are desperately fascinated with physical healing. How many people would watch a documentary about God miraculously setting people free from sin vs a movie about watching a guy's leg grow on camera? You can go to heaven with a leg that doesn't measure up, but you cannot go to heaven with a heart that doesn't measure up. - *Matthew 5:8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God."*

Maybe one day, God will make a way for me to fly around the world with a camera guy and interview some of the many people like Kim who are taking the John 7:17 Challenge and have seen their hearts completely changed by obedience to Jesus Christ. We don't need more physical healing stories. We need spiritual healing from sin stories, the one thing the devil hates the most!

Kay, the cleaning lady struggling with unforgiveness had chronic COPD when I met her. She can die with COPD and still go to heaven. She cannot die with sin, rebellion, or unforgiveness in her heart and still go to heaven. Do you see the difference my friend? Suppose she was running to these miracle healers and got her COPD cured, but then she was left with that bitterness in her heart because no one told her about the true requirements of the gospel because it's just so offensive.

According to Jesus in Mark 9:38-40 and Matthew 12:27, even people that don't belong to Christ, and even the Pharisees and their disciples were capable of casting out demons. Indeed, they had the power to do these miracles. What they didn't have was the far superior internal grace in the heart to become anything more than a child of the devil. This is why Jesus warned in Matthew 7:21-23 that there would be many who would indeed do visible external miracles, signs, and wonders in his name, but who would one day hear, *"I never knew you. Away from me you evildoers."*

So, why then, if I am saying that internal grace is superior to external grace, am I now going to share some of the stories in my life which showcase the external grace? Simple, because Father asked me to proclaim the wonderful deeds He has done in my life and I cannot do that without also sharing the visible parts of what He did.

Someone might say, but why is that necessary if we are all to live by faith and not by sight, and didn't Jesus say, *"it is a wicked and adulterous generation who asks for a sign"*? I believe one of the main reasons Father asks us to do this is because of His mercy to help sincere Christians who really want to believe Him, but who may be struggling with unbelief. These are extraordinarily difficult days to be a Christian, however where sin and darkness abound, His grace abounds all the more when He can find a wholehearted servant (2 Chronicles 16:9).

God is willing to help us believe Him when He sees we have that mustard seed of faith. The great faith I have in Him today came from Him, not me, and it started out as little faith. When God told me many things that would happen in my life before they actually did, it helped me to believe Him even more when what He said came true. I gave Him my little mustard seed and He made it grow into a large tree!

Mark 9:24 Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief."

John 14:29 "I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe."

The wicked and adulterous generation Jesus spoke of in Matthew 12:39 were not people like you and I who are sincerely struggling in our desire to believe and follow Jesus Christ. They despised Him and hated him and their asking for a miracle was done in a mocking attitude. It was more like them asking, *"Oh yeah, well let me see your magic show Mr. Messiah...let's see what kind of power you've got if you're really the big shot Son of God."* Please read Luke 4:23 and Mat 27:42-44 for examples.

God's visible external grace helps many of us to believe Him in these very dark days, but it only comes after we have some level of sincere mustard seed faith to bring to Him. How amazing is His loving kindness to help those of us with a humble heart and a mustard seed of faith!

*Jas 4:6 But he gives us **more grace**. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."*

Also, God validates His messages through His servants. *Exo 4:30 And Aaron told them everything the LORD had said to Moses. He also performed the signs before the people, and they believed.*

Joh 14:11-14 Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves. (12) I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. (13) And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. (14) You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

My friend, I am not lying and God will prove it in this story for those who have ears to hear. I am indeed in possession of the fullness of Christ and it is gloriously beyond the explanation of human words. I walk daily in the seven things Christ promised to all true followers of His, *divine provision* (Mat 6:31-34), *rest* (Mat 11:28-30), *contentment* (John 4:13-14), *freedom from sin* (John 8:31-36), *peace* (John 14:27), *answered prayers and fruitfulness* (John 15:5-8), and with the *joy of the Lord* made complete in my heart (John 15:9-11), even when I am suffering. Indeed, I was thirsty and now rivers of living water flow from my belly to others, thanks be to the Lord! (John 7:37)

Two thousand years of exceptional Christian testimonials have proved that an abundant spiritual life in Christ is available to *all* who will come to Him on his terms, regardless of the rocky path they have been on. I hate to be cliché but, *if God will do it for me, he will do it for any one!* I am not worthy of Father's astonishing grace in my life, but I will not despise it or Him, by hiding it either. Our God is Amazing!

Mark 2:12 This amazed everyone and they praised God saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

Without fear of overhyping the story, I can say to you with confidence, *"You have never seen anything like this!"* In 27 years of being a Christian, I've never heard of anything this amazing or complex. A person being raised from the dead is a piece of cake for God compared to what I have witnessed Him do in my own life over and over. One pastor when he heard only one part of the story said, *"Michael God is doing something historical here...I've never seen anything like this in all my years of ministry."* That man, has no idea about the most incredible parts of my story! I think after you hear what God has done, you will understand why I feel like Father wrote Exodus 34:10 for me.

Then the LORD said: "I am making a covenant with you. Before all your people I will do wonders never before done in any nation in all the world. The people you live among will see how awesome is the work that I, the LORD, will do for you.

Great are the works of the Lord; they are pondered by all who delight in them. – Psalm 111:2

I know you are anxious to hear it all, but please be patient with me. As your loving brother in Christ, I first must warn you that supernatural signs and wonders are not remotely a guarantee that the work is from God. In fact, today, far more often than not they are from the devil.

Jesus warned us to be very careful that we are not deceived by false prophets and false teachers (Mat 24:24) and the apostle John warned us to test every spirit (1 John 4:1). I've seen incredible videos of gold fillings in people's teeth, gold dust covering pastors, manna showing up in Bibles, "glory clouds" flying in a church, crying statues of the virgin Mary, moving heads on Jesus statues, Stigmata, jewels appearing on the ground in churches, and many more things like this that we must discern and test! The devil is doing all kinds of things around the world and in churches where people can say, *"We have never seen anything like this!"*. See (2 Thes 2:9-12) So, how can we know what things are from the Lord?

False teachers also preach boldly in the name of Jesus, they do many charitable deeds, and share many true teachings and principles in the word of God. However, their teaching will always be *off* in some very significant way which strongly appeals to your flesh. As Dave Hunt used to say, even rat poison is 98% delicious and nutritious (truth). It is the 2% of poison (error) that kills the rat.

With a false teacher, typically your flesh will find itself being enticed and saying, “*amen...amen*” to things that a spiritual person will not say amen to (like the promise of material blessing or how graceful God is even though you are still living in sin.). Some of these teachers will exploit you with *stories they have made up* and convince you that God wants to bless you with temporal abundance. This is the “prosperity gospel” which claims God wants you to be happy, healthy and wealthy *now*, and if you aren’t it’s because you don’t have enough faith, or you have unconfessed sin in your life.

Prosperity preachers aren’t the only *false* teachers. There are also legalists and cult groups that may not be promising prosperity but instead they seek to control the people with a, “*we are the only ones who have it right and therefore the only one’s going to heaven*” type of a message. There were apparently even *miraculous answers to prayer* in the deadliest cult of all time, the People’s Temple under Jim Jones. Who was it that was answering those prayers?

My wife Persis is from India and just from a few of her own stories I can say with confidence that there are far more supernatural things going on in the Hindu temples in India than there are in all the churches in North America. Who is doing them? It is the same one who gave the Egyptian magicians their power to counterfeit Moses’ miracles in Exodus 7:22 and the same one we find speaking with Jesus here.

*Luke 4:5-7 The devil led him (Jesus) up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. (6) And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for **it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to.** (7) So if you worship me, it will all be yours."*

Until a Christian has strong discernment, any of these types of messages can strongly appeal to the desires or fears of the flesh and they are exceptionally effective at deceiving people when they are accompanied by the supernatural. When a Christian has a strong desire to hear from God or to see the supernatural, this is ground for the devil’s deception.

We shouldn’t be afraid of the supernatural and we shouldn’t despise God’s power, but we should be wise and test it all. The bible says the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of *power* (1 Cor 4:20). It has the power to change your life and the power to influence others for Christ. I have seen this power in several ways, but there is authentic power and counterfeit power. Let me give you a few other basic examples.

There have been a few times where the Lord blessed me with very specific insight no one else had into a person’s life. One day I was in prayer and the Lord moved me to call and warn a very godly and well-respected business man whom I hadn’t spoken with or heard from in two years. I was reluctant to do it because he was an older brother in the Lord and very well respected for his faith and work in Christ, but in obedience to the Spirit I made a message for him saying that He had fallen into a sin which was robbing Him of God’s favor in his business. Two days later he replied in shock and admitted that he had turned back to pornography the week before I messaged him.

On another occasion, a gentleman contacted me who was facing 20 years of prison and having to register as a sex-offender in a very unfortunate case against him. He was scared to death and having dreams about killing himself. By the Lord’s power, I was able to tell him emphatically that he was not going to have to do either. My telling him this was the grace of the Lord to keep him from sinking. In fact, the Lord was

so gracious that he only went to jail for one year, and was blessed of the Lord with favor from a guard during his time.

I'll share one more of these so you will believe. Just this past week as I'm editing this document, the Lord had me warn a very zealous brother who reached out to me in a recording with his wife, to tell me about their testimonies and love for the Lord. While listening, I discerned Father was going to let this man fall hard and that I was supposed to warn him just like Jesus did Peter in Matthew 26:34. Two days after he replied to my warning assuring me he was good, he had an affair. In His love for Him, God warned him in advance, just like he did me when I fell into sexual sin as a single person, to break him from pride and self-confidence. There is power in the kingdom of God. Remember, Jesus said those who have faith in Him *will do the same things He did*.

However, false teachers and false prophets can also sometimes accurately share unknown past or future events in people's lives also. The late Dave Hunt got off a plane in India to speak at a conference and a man who was *not* supposed to pick him up came up to him to give him a ride to the event. When Dave questioned him, the man was able to tell Dave his full name, where he lived in CA, and what he was doing in India. Think about it. Was that the power of God? No, it was the power and divination of an evil spirit and he stayed away from that man. The devil indeed has power. He is a brilliant counterfeiter. Don't think you can't be fooled! I even test all the things that I experience in my life by the following method.

So, how can we know if a pastor is a false teacher, or if the signs and wonders or prophecies are coming from God or Satan? How do you know if the power and signs in my life are coming from God or if I am a false teacher? There are several ways but Jesus Christ gave us a solid test. He told us we will "recognize a tree by its *fruit*." The fruit on a tree shows us the type of tree it is, and it reveals the outcome or result of the tree's health and production. First, as we grow in discernment we can see the false teacher will reveal his heart through his words or some part of his temperament which consistently contradicts the Spirit of Christ. Let me give you a few personal examples that I've seen as a spiritual man making judgments of all things just as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:15.

And by the way, if you have problems with me naming names, please see Luke 13:32, Acts 13:8, 2 Timothy 2:16-17, 2 Timothy 4:10, 4:14-15, and 3 John 1:9.

When I see T.D. Jakes haughtily strutting across that stage like a proud rooster with his head held back and yelling out, "*Y'all ain't listening...let me try this side over here.*" or when I see him sitting on the Oprah Winfrey show talking to a secular and New Age thinking audience about how you can live your dream, I cannot reconcile that spirit with the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ who is in me.

I wasn't able to reconcile Ted Haggard, the former pastor of New Life Church in Colorado, standing in front of an interviewer zealously saying evangelicals have the best sex lives and then asking right on camera two of his own church leaders how often they have sex with their wives and how often their wives have an orgasm. Can you possibly imagine the Holy Spirit asking anyone this?

I am unable to reconcile Joel Osteen telling jokes at the beginning of each sermon when people are going to hell from hyper grace teaching, or to reconcile his *find your best life now* message with Christ's *lose your life now to find it* message. I'm not able to reconcile the ten-million-dollar home of a Joyce Meyer, or her husband's apparent golf addiction with the true Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ, who teaches us to say no to worldly pleasures and wealth. And they go on saying, "*Well, God has blessed us!*".

Then what is He doing for me according to their definition of blessing, since I'm now the poorest person financially in my entire circle, or what has He done for my wife Persis since she grew up literally the poorest

person I've ever met? Is God not blessing us? On the contrary, we enjoy the true riches...the great spiritual treasures. Perhaps you've seen my first story video. I know how to earn a large income. Even now, I could do all kinds of things to make money even in this ministry and say, "*Look, the Lord is blessing me...come follow me to blessings and treasures on earth.*" (If I ever start preaching that by the way, you can know the devil has won me over and I say run) I could start by allowing advertising on my YouTube videos, taking away all three free versions of the John 7:17 Challenge, selling this book instead of giving it away for free, asking a fee for the thousands of personal recordings I've made for people around the world, etc. I don't do these things, because I'm not interested in seeking temporary earthly riches. I am seeking spiritual riches and this is why I could never work with or have a relationship with any of those or a multitude of other false teachers. I have nothing in common with them spiritually even though they have the name of Christ on their lips and a Bible on their podium.

I'm following a very different Jesus because I can't possibly imagine Christ, the disciples, or any of the greatest true servants of God that have ever lived, doing things like this. Seriously, can you see Jesus Christ, Paul, Peter, John Bunyan, Madame Guyon, Hudson Taylor, George Muller, Amy Carmichael, Gladys Aylward, D.L. Moody, Andrew Murray, Charles Spurgeon, John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, John Owen, or an A.W. Tozer, strutting across a stage like a proud rooster, asking about other's sex lives and orgasms on camera, going on the Oprah show, or living in a ten-million-dollar house from the profits of their ministry? I will refrain from what I would like to write next and simply defer to Paul...

1 Timothy 6:5 They are...men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.

People that follow these teachers, even me for a time, will find that they are being enticed by the desires of their flesh not the Holy Spirit. The love of money and material prosperity is one of the greatest barriers to the true treasure and presence of Christ in your heart. As you will clearly see in my story, you cannot have two loves or two Masters.

Heb 13:5 Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

Another visible part of the fruit of false teachers is their congregation or followers. When we look at the lives of those he is preaching to, we can ask questions like this to ascertain more about his fruit?

As we look at the character of the congregation or followers do we see increasing holiness and faithfulness? Christian history has shown that if the Holy Spirit is the one doing the preaching and teaching, there will be increasing *holiness*. There will be people moving from sinful carnal and worldly Christianity to true spiritual Christ followers. There will be people surrendering at the heart level, and not just the lip level. There will be people taking up their cross and denying their flesh in sacrificial ways, gaining freedom from sin, losing their life to find it, obeying the words of Christ unto death, abandoning their will and coming in full submission to the will of Christ in their life regardless of the cost? *By the way, I know this all sounds scary if are just starting to take Christ seriously, but please don't panic. God will help you and give you strength in ways you do not yet understand or possess. Just keep reading the story...don't cliff jump yet please!*

With true believers, it will be clear that God is their master, not money. The Father will become increasingly their magnificent obsession. They will chase holiness and godliness, not the supernatural. They will love God and not more of His stuff? Most importantly, we can see the fruit of the Holy Spirit increasing in their everyday life. Just think back on Mr. Kim's testimony. Perhaps go back and re-read it and look at the type of fruit coming from him now. Look at what he sees as important now. He is a piece of fruit which God

is producing through His work in my ministry. Remember, a tree produces after its own kind. Kim is a reflection of the type of Spirit at work in me, and now in him, which is the Holy Spirit. A worldly, money loving preacher will produce worldly, money loving followers. A spiritual, God loving preacher will produce spiritual, God loving Christians.

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Gal 5:24

Those are not all, but some of the major characteristics of a spiritual man or woman. Even with the presence of signs and wonders which are believed to be from God, a false teacher will characteristically produce worldly and carnal Christians who often stay stuck in sin. They will not be producing holy and spiritual Christians. They can be among the most zealous and charming or charismatic believers and honor God much with their lips, but their hearts and actions give them away.

Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. Mat 7:17-20

Fifteen minutes after writing past this part of the book, I took a break to check my email and received this email, which is another perfect example of the point I am making. Let's read and see if we can discern the type of fruit that is being produced here.

Message: Hey Mike , my name is Daniel I'm 24 years old, I surrendered my life to Christ and his will about June 3-4. I been living like a fake follower wanting God but doing my own will. Following the ways of men, there's a lot more that I can say about what I've been through as a kid, but now I can say I see that God has allowed all this to happen in order for me to be broken and fixed by him and to truly see who I am before God. The day I truly surrendered I was so frustrated with the way I was, so a thought came across my mind to type in the words on google search "how do I surrender to God when I don't want to". At this point in my life I was enjoying sin and at the same time hating it because I felt I was under Gods wrath and it was a sucky way to live every day. Then one of your videos was recommended so I listened to it and the Holy Spirit started to give me understanding and a revelation that came to me such that I fully surrendered the next day. I am now completely free from all addictions that I was in. I'm on about day 44 on your john 7:17 challenge. It's been really helping me. Thank you so much.

Unlike the visible parlor tricks of the devil, all external visible grace from the Father has its aim, under the New Covenant, to produce that which is most pleasing to God, an internal faith and righteousness in the heart called Holiness. Any external visible grace in a believer's life which does not lead to the changing of the heart, is either a counterfeit of Satan, or a true grace which has been squandered or trampled.

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. (12) It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, - Tit 2:11-12

It is good that we ponder and marvel at God's wondrous deeds but please remember this important principle. The most important part of my story to God, is not the astonishing wonders and visible outcomes. Those are only the visible proof of a greater internal grace. They are the rewards, the stamps of approval from Father, on the steadfast faith that was walked out in private, in my heart, along the way.

Heb 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

And remember, do not covet the experiences of others. God knows what each of us need, and apportions His grace just as He sees fit (Ephesians 4:7). There are people everywhere who are walking in the same amount of His internal grace, if not more, than I am, yet they may have never seen the amount of visible grace you will see in this story. They are loved just the same if they are humbling obeying His words!

His incredible grace in my life is primarily in direct proportion to the massive amount of weakness I faced in my journey to fullness in Christ. Indeed, where the enemy came in like a flood, God raised up a standard against Him and where weakness and sin abounded in my life, you will see that grace abounded all the more. We serve a powerful, faithful, merciful, and loving Father. Thank you so much Abba!

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. (10) That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. – 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

Introduction

The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, And his sovereignty rules over all. Dominion and awe belong to God; he establishes order in the heights of heaven. "I choose the appointed time...Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will stand." Psa 103:19 Job 25:2 Psa 75:2 Isa 14:24

Indeed, our God and Father has shown His marvelous power and Sovereignty in my life in ways that are beyond human comprehension. In my divorce story alone, He did something so amazing that even after hundreds of thousands of views, I've never heard from anyone who has ever heard anything like it.

And yet, no one has heard the unbelievable, heaven touching earth details, of how I ended up 8,720 miles away in Hyderabad, India on March 24th 2016, to marry wife Persis. It is even more incredible than the 777-day divorce story! Standing in between this promise from God for Persis to be my wife, were over 30 major obstacles which neither of us had the resources or power to get around. Just like the divorce, Father did not permit me to ask anyone else for help or to make known my needs to anyone but Him. If this marriage was going to happen it could only be by God's power, in response to our walking by faith into His promises. Without His guidance and help, at every point, this was going to be impossible! It indeed became a marriage of miracles as God guided us moment by moment through it all and we responded with risky faith. I am so excited about finally being able to tell this story. It's almost as if, somewhere inside of me, there is a 14-year-old teenage girl who screaming like she's on the front row at a Justin Bieber concert.

I have discovered that God has been designing my life with such a mathematical precision that it can hardly be believed even after you hear it, which is why I thank God Almighty that he moved me to record all of it digitally in audio, video and pictures. Can you imagine discovering that the top three most significant events in your life were all completed in the exact same number of days? What if you then discovered that every single step in your top most significant life event, were all done without exception, with back to back alternating sequences of time, in increments of the two most popular numbers in the Bible?

Like something out of a sci-fi movie, my personal story has so many mathematically precise events in it that it brings total death to the atheist's faith in a completely random universe. It will be easier for an atheist to believe he doesn't really exist, than it will be for him to hear my story and then try to tell himself, nothing happens on purpose or by design. I cannot wait to tell you this story my friend, but please remember this

is a learning journey to better understand God's ways so you can walk in them in your own life, not just a showcase of God's incredible power.

The story is written in two dramatically different parts. Part one is called "The Carnal Christian Years" and Part two is called "The Spiritual Christian Years." They show the difference between a "Christian" life and ministry built by *me*, versus a Christian life and ministry built by *God*. Part one represents the best results *I* was able to generate in my own strength as I lived zealously *for* Christ, even with some supernatural supply from above. What I built was a life and ministry full of *Ishmaels* or things built entirely from the will, plans, and efforts of man. The result was a life which appeared successful to the world but spiritually it was a fruitless life of bondage, slavery and failure, a life that God was going to have to tear down before He could begin building up.

Part two represents the results *Father* is now producing in my life, after tearing down my building, by *His* Spirit and grace, as I live by faith, *from* Christ, in full humble submission to His will. This is resulting in a new life and new ministry of *Isaacs*, or things birthed from Father's will, Father's promises, and Father's power. Now, a fruit which lasts is being produced (John 15:16). I am amazed and grateful to Father for Him even allowing there to be a part two of my story, especially after how bad part one was.

You will read about much suffering in both parts. In part one I am suffering for doing wrong or making foolish decisions. In part two I am still suffering and sometimes even more, but now I am suffering for doing good, partaking in the death, persecutions, and sufferings of Christ. I get no rewards for the suffering I faced in the first half of my life, but Father commends the suffering I now participate in as I obey Christ.

1 Peter 2:20-21 But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

Someone once told me that my life story was helping the Word of God to become "flesh" for them. It was like putting clothes on naked truth and making it real to them. Indeed, there is much to be gleaned from the details of testimonies like this about how God works and thinks, and about how God does *not* work and *does not* think. My desire is that those who have been given eyes to see will recognize some of their own mistakes or some of God's dealings with me in their own journey. And afterwards, by His grace may they make the necessary corrections towards becoming a true spiritual man or woman of God. I pray you receive new spiritual wisdom and understanding from the spoils of war I have won on this journey.

A Hard Bone to Swallow

My prayer is that God's clear Sovereign signature and powerful providence in this story will encourage many who are seeking fullness in Him, as they listen more intently to my pleadings for them to give all in absolute surrender to Christ. However, I am also praying that these stories shake up the false ground or unbelief some readers may be currently standing on.

There are atheists who say I'm having a "god delusion", Seventh day Adventists who believe I am hell bound because I do not honor the "Sabbath", Catholics who believe I cannot be saved because I do not submit to the authority of the pope, Mormons who are convinced I'm missing out on Christ's new revelation to America, the "earth is flat" group who claims the devil has deceived me with a globe, Charismatics who think I'm still not filled with the Spirit because I don't speak in tongues, Baptist ministers who think I'm

under God's curse because I not only don't tithe but I teach against it, the "church man" who thinks I'm deceived because I don't belong to a building he calls "church", Torah observant "Christians" who wish to inform me that if I really want to please God I must abstain from certain unclean foods, observe special feasts and days, and divorce Persis because I am living every single day in adultery. There are many more who have accused me of seeking honor for myself, being an anti-Christ, selling the gospel, abandoning my children, doing witchcraft, being a heretic, leading others astray, twisting the word of God for my own benefit, or being unChristlike.

To borrow an Indian saying from my wife Persis, this story, for many of *those* people who have the courage to read it, is going to be *a very hard bone to swallow*. May there be much hard swallowing in the name of Jesus and may there be much truth and life which result!

Luk 7:33-35 For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' (34) *The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners.'"* (35) ***But wisdom is proved right by all her children (actions).***"

Mat 12:33 "Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit.

Disclaimer

If you have listened to many of my messages, you know how transparently I have shared my worst sins and failures against God. In order to tell this part of my story, it requires that I expose some of the evil and sins God permitted others to commit against me, especially my ex-wife. However, some Christians are sensitive to this and seem to believe all exposure of sin or evil is slander or unloving. I don't want anyone to stumble over this, so please let me show the Biblical precedent for doing so and let me assure you that by the end of the story you will rest confident I have done all of this in submission to His will.

John 9:31 We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will.

The Bible itself, penned by men, as moved by the Spirit of God, openly reveals the evils committed by and against some of God's most notable servants. We know the evil committed against Joseph by his brothers, the hatred and oppression of Pharaoh to the Israelites and Moses, Miriam's dishonoring of Moses, the persecution of Isaac by Ishmael, the mocking and ridiculing of Nehemiah by Sanballat, the torments from King Saul against David, David's betrayal of Uriah and Bathsheba, Delilah's betrayal of Samson, Haman's betrayal of Mordecai, Judas' betrayal of Jesus, Peter's denial of Jesus and His hypocrisy against the Gentiles and Paul, the Jews stoning of Stephen, Alexander the metal worker's harm of Paul. Also, we know of the malicious gossiping Diotrephes was doing against the apostle John in 3 John and that the apostle was going to expose him by telling the whole church.

In God's time, and by His will, there is good in exposing sin, hypocrisy and the evil committed by others. Our victory over the evil's committed against us, comforts others who are still suffering. This produces perseverance in the saints which results in glory to God. I am not able to bring God the full glory He deserves in my life, for the light He gave me, until I tell how dark the darkness was from which He saved me.

There is a big difference between exposing the sin of a repentant sinner or someone who stumbled into sin vs. exposing the sin of the unrepentant or the hypocrisy of the self-righteous. In Ephesians 5, Paul tells us to have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness but rather to *expose them* because everything *exposed* by the light becomes visible. In Matthew 18, Jesus even told us to publicly tell the church about our brother or sister who has sinned against us, if they would not listen to us or other witnesses. He also taught there is nothing hidden that will not be brought out into the open (Luke 8:17) and Paul taught Timothy to rebuke leaders who sinned publicly so that others may take warning (1 Tim 5:20).

I've been accused of being "unChristlike" for doing this. Jesus Christ was not being "unChristlike" when He spoke the harshest public rebukes ever heard to the Pharisees in Matthew 23. Paul was not being "unChristlike" when He confronted Peter's hypocrisy publicly, or when he wrote a letter about it, making a record of it for thousands of years and millions of people to read about it in Gal 2:11-13. Martin Luther was not being "unChristlike" when he publicly exposed the evil hypocrisy of named leaders in the Roman Catholic church, all the way up to and including the pope. John Bunyan was not being "unChristlike" when he published the names, statements, and false accusations of the justices and others who stood against him in court to sentence him to jail for not submitting to the church of England. Madame Guyon was not being "unChristlike" when she revealed in her biography the incessant and ruthless antagonism of her mother-in-law and their servants, or when she exposed the names of the church leaders which so horribly slandered and persecuted her and then threw her into jail.

Nor, am I being "unChristlike" when I expose the evil committed against me by others when I began desiring to truly give up this world and follow hard after Christ. My motive is not to try to payback or punish anyone, but rather to expose the discipline God brought into my life through them. I leave all the correction and justice to God. In fact, where it seemed appropriate to do so, I have concealed identities by leaving off last names or using a fictitious name, such as the name Jennifer for my ex-wife.

Also, none of the sins against me were worse than *my own sins* against God in this story, where I was calling myself a Christian for 19 years and denying Him by my actions. The sins committed against me were either caused by or allowed by God because of the greater sins I had committed. The sins of others against me were being used of God to break me, to discipline me, to save me, and to strengthen me.

Our real enemy is not the people who do the evil to us, but as A.W. Tozer taught, our real first enemy is our self. You will see in this story, once I got my spiritual problem with God taken care of, my other battles were taken care of. When we submit to Father and get our hearts right before him, the devil can no longer do any lasting harm (James 4:6-7, 1 John 5:18).

There are no sins in this story which God could not or would not forgive, upon true confession and repentance through Jesus Christ. I hold no unforgiveness in my heart towards anyone and I thank God for using them to help me to get right with Him.

Like John Bunyan desired to do with his life, I too desire to share the spiritual plunder which I have taken in these battles and share it here for the repair and building up on the body of Christ, his temple. 1 Chro 26:27

Please do not imitate my faith in doing this, unless you have received clear guidance and direction from the Lord and unless you have been walking as a spiritually mature Christian for some time. Anything not done

in faith or with pure motives is sin, and if you have any doubts about doing so, you will be condemning yourself as Paul taught in Rom 14:23.

God gave me the promise of Isaiah 14:4 years ago, that I indeed would one day take up this taunt against my oppressor, *“How the oppressor has come to an end! How his fury has ended.”*

Ecc 12:14 For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.

Mat 10:26-27 "So do not be afraid of them. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. (27) What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs.

PART 1

The Carnal Christian Years

Chapter 1

From “Myselfianity” to Christianity

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. –
1 Cor 3:1 NASB

In 2012, long before my divorce trial was finalized, God asked me to begin the work of telling the story of what He had done in my life through the story you may have already watched on YouTube called “Trusting God in the Storm.” Ironically, but not surprisingly, He asked me to do this *before* that amazing and victorious ending had come. I simply did it by faith in His words to me. Walking in faith is always risky, but this is the only way to please God. He has to see our faith in action and many times He asks us to move forward on something, or to stop doing something long before we can see the result, or in the face of circumstances which contradict what He is asking of us. This is what it means to walk by faith and not by sight.

*John 11:38-41 Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. (39) "Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." (40) Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" (41) **So they took away the stone.***

And we know the rest of this story don't we. Indeed, in response to their faith to roll that stone away, they saw the glory of God in spite of something that was absolutely humanly impossible. Lazarus came walking out in his grave clothes. How incredible!

Incidentally, at the very moment I am editing this part of the story, there are very difficult circumstances arising which could seriously contradict one of the stories which Father has asked me to share in this book. Just like my divorce story, if Father does not act, it will be a tragic failure and embarrassment for me to have included that part of the story. If I was still being led by sight and my circumstances, I should indeed not include this part of the story in the book, but I know better now. I have seen Father do this now, many, many times and He has established a track record of faithfulness with me. He has already given me a promise to remove the obstacles that are standing in my way and He has asked me to keep moving forward on this project in faith. So, as you can see, even as I write this story about faith, I am indeed walking by faith despite the storm I see coming at me. I will share what happened at the end of the book, but since you are reading this you can know God once again came through for me in answer to my faith in His direction and promise.

After a few “false starts” with “Trusting God in the Storm”, I put it on YouTube permanently in November of 2015. It highlighted my difficult childhood and how I eventually achieved the so called “good life” only to then lose it twice, once to a catastrophic business failure and the second time through a terrible betrayal by the wife of my youth.

The story ended with a dramatic fulfillment of a promise from God, to deliver me in divorce court after He told me to risk everything by firing my attorney and to trust Him alone for my defense. But at the beginning of that story I posed a question that I never actually answered. It was the question of “*Why did this happen and what was the purpose of all this suffering in my life?*” With Father’s help, I came to see and understand His hand in all my afflictions and to see the very good purposes for them.

For 19 years, I had been calling myself a follower of Jesus Christ, yet it was a powerless shell of the walk I have with God today. All those years, I certainly had a sincere love for God and I held my Christian beliefs with great zeal, but in daily living and action, I was the true ruler of my life not God. I was the boss and I was calling the shots. I was the master. I was the king of my life. Looking back on it, I see it would have been more appropriate to describe my religion as, “MySelfianity” rather than “Christianity”. I was actually following myself, but doing it all in the name of Jesus Christ.

After all those years of zealous effort, the results I ended up with were spiritual bondage and failure. I loved God and I wanted to live like Jesus Christ, but I remained in bondage to my pride, the opinions of men, earning money, idolatry, worldly success and pleasures, and ignorance. As Paul describes in Galatians 4, I was growing up in the house of the slave woman (Hagar), not the free woman (Sarah).

I didn’t have eyes to see it yet, but I wasn’t living in full submission to God, or under the New Covenant blessing. I was living as if I was under the Old Covenant where everything in my relationship with Christ and my righteousness before God was largely dependent on me. This powerless “Myselfianity” was the result of trying to live righteous before God according to my own designs and by the strength of my flesh, exactly like the Israelites in the Old Covenant. I avoided the obvious evils and I was zealous for God, but I was living without that righteousness in my heart, which is the only place righteousness counts in the New Covenant.

Mat 5:20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

In the place of fullness in Christ, and spiritual power from the Holy Spirit to live like Jesus Christ, I settled for the watered down hyper-grace gospel. Rather than actually living like Christ and taking up my cross in obedience unto death, instead I was using my “Christianity” and the cross of Christ, like spiritual good luck charms to hang on all of *my* plans, *my* ambitions, and *my* problems. My hopes were that by doing so God would make *my* plans successful and then I would give him credit, and thus we all would be happy. **I was foolishly trying to use spirituality and Biblical principles to build and improve my temporary earthly life, rather than using my temporary earthly life to build and improve my eternal spiritual life.**

John 6:27 Do not work for food which spoils, but for food which endures to eternal life.

2 Corinthians 4:18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

God mercifully intervened in my ignorance, thoroughly frustrated and crushed my self-life, and then graciously made Himself and His true ways known to me. And finally, He brought me into the life of fullness in Christ, such that even after losing everything in this world I was soon able to say, “*I am now among the richest people I know.*” I am shocked to see how much these next two sentences in the Bible seem to have been written specifically for me.

Revelation 3:17–18 (Jesus speaking) You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me

gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

Indeed, I too was wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. Just as Jesus warned those in the Church of Laodicea, I realize that if I would have continued living in what I was calling “Christianity”, I would have never made it into the Promised Land I am now enjoying in God’s kingdom, or into heaven when I died. I was among the fruitless, immature, half-hearted, lukewarm, weighed down, professing “Christians” who are taking up valuable soil and in danger of being cut off. (See Matthew 3:10, Luke 8:13-15, 13:7, 14:34-35, 21:34, John 15:2, 6, Hebrews 6:7-8)

I now know that at the end of my life, my train would be found running right off the cliff and into the abyss. But God, in His indescribable mercy, came after me and never gave up on me. He watched me hijack His name for all those years while running all the hills as an untamed, unbroken, unsubmitive, wild horse. It was going to take many years, but Father had a plan to one day finally and fully break me. He was going to take me on the only path to spiritual abundance which is in the following Psalm.

Psa 66:10-12 For you, O God, tested us; you refined us like silver. (11) You brought us into prison and laid burdens on our backs. (12) You let men ride over our heads; we went through fire and water, but you brought us to a place of abundance.

At the age of 43, I can look back on my life so far and see that even from childhood, next to love and acceptance, freedom was always the greatest desire of my heart.

I grew up in a very small but very famous beachside town called Cape Canaveral, FL, where my best friend Joel Reinhart and I were allowed to explore nearly every square foot of the city, unsupervised. We played on every street, every empty lot, and every patch of woods on the river and on the beachside. I loved the freedom of being able to go anywhere, even to run miles down the beach, all by ourselves with no restrictions and no fear of harm.

Until the age of nine, with only a few exceptions, I enjoyed a safe and comfortable life. I was free and I felt very loved by all of my family. Then came the day my childhood dream life was turned upside down. It was the day my parents sat me down and told me they didn’t love each other anymore and that mommy and daddy were getting something called a divorce. Within days, all my freedom and comfort was replaced by a prison of fear and uncertainty.

Throughout the next decade I experienced some very difficult things beyond just my parent’s divorce. There was being lied to about moving away from my Dad, being abandoned by one grandfather and rejected by the other, sexual abuses by both sexes, being terrorized and chased home by bullies for about three years, being held under water one time till I almost drowned, being beat to a bloody mess by the bullies in front of my mother, finding her one day on the verge of suicide, saving one of my best friends from suicide only to have him later succeed, being chased around the house and tormented by my cocaine addicted step-mother, being falsely accused and kicked out the house by my father, my mother and I both being emotionally abused and kicked out of our home twice by my step-father, having to drop out of college because of two physical injuries, then at age 20 being told my father wasn’t actually my father, then being rejected by my blood father twice, almost dying in a collision with an 18-wheeler, getting thrown in jail for running from a police officer on my motorcycle, etc.

Even though no one in my family knew Christ, by His mercy, I became a believer in Jesus in the 10th grade. I was riding home from school one day with my friend Matthew Eldridge who had been telling me and my mother about Jesus for several weeks. I had been resistant to his evangelism, thinking Christianity was

only for weak people. But that day I stepped out of his car and onto a piece of paper that read, "*If you died in a car accident today, would you go to heaven or hell?*" I became afraid because I couldn't answer the question and I started reading the Bible voraciously for the next week or so. Unfortunately, I can't remember much of it because I have many black spots in my memory where I simply cannot remember things that happened. For the writing of this book, I had to look back on journal entries and through thousands of emails to recall many of the details I have included.

Unlike many, I don't remember the exact day I became a believer but I remember it happened in my bedroom. I don't remember saying the "sinners prayer" or recall having any special experience, but I do remember I became so excited and amazed by what I read about Jesus in the Gospels all alone in my bedroom for hours. I became a believer and was hungry to read the Bible but the Word of God was quickly choked off by the worries of my life and the pursuit of other things. Within just a few months of my becoming a believer in Christ, my mother and I were kicked out of my alcoholic step-father's house a second time. This time it was permanent and they divorced. My mom and I moved to a very small country town called Grant, AL, where my grandparents, my mom's mom and step-father, Jerry and Bonnie Smith lived. My mother and I attended the small Baptist church in town a few times, just long enough for both of us to get baptized. After that my mom quit taking us because she thought that was all we needed to do to be good with God and go to heaven.

From the time I graduated high-school in 1991, through my late thirties, my life can best be described as a series of self-made desperate attempts to regain the lost comfort and freedom I had known as a child. Because of an experience I had years earlier, I was driven to find my freedom through money.

In Money I Trust

When I was fifteen years old, my wealthy grandfather, who had just been through his fourth divorce, took me with him to the post office to pick up all his cashed out mutual funds. I think I probably opened checks by myself totaling over a million dollars in just a few minutes. The sight of that much money, after all the trouble I had seen in my young life, gave me feelings of hope and euphoria.

When I was 19, I dropped out of George Wallace State Community college just short of an associate's degree due to an injury. My major was mechanical and architectural drafting and I broke my drawing finger in an accident. That prevented me from taking enough credit hours for my scholarship to kick in over the summer quarter, plus I could no longer work at my job with UPS, United Parcel Service loading the trucks early in the morning. Then, when I tried to come back to school after Summer, I took a construction job and had all the bones in my right foot crushed under the bucket of a front-end loader. They paid my medical bills but because they were paying me cash, I had no way of getting workers compensation, so I ended up losing that job as well.

I could no longer afford to keep going to school, so I decided to drop out and move back home with my mother. Soon after, I found a job selling Filter Queen vacuum cleaners door to door in Huntsville, AL. I set a first week sales record and earned \$2,700 in commission in just a few days. I remember thinking that \$9/hr loading UPS trucks was great money and now I was consistently earning about \$1200 a week and maintaining my own schedule! There was a large amount of money for me at the time and it gave me a sense of power and freedom from all the troubles and people that had afflicted me through my childhood. Those are the days I started subconsciously making money my god.

In my own eyes and in the eyes of the world, I wouldn't have been seen as an evil person. I was guilty of pre-marital sex with girlfriends in my teens, but I wasn't out drinking and drugging or trying to hurt others for my own gain. I had no idea that people doing those kinds of things were better off than me because people won't encourage you to stay in those obvious sins, but people, even professing Christians, were going to encourage me for many years to pursue and earn lots of money to find my life and happiness.

Heb 13:5 Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

Learning to Trust in Myself

Most of the freedom I had lost in my early life was at the hands of those around me who were supposed to love me. Now, like a wild horse that had been free at one time, later taken into captivity, and then freed again, I wasn't about to let anyone put me back into the fence. I didn't want anyone to tell me what to do or control me, not even employers.

In 1993, at 19 years old, I was earning enough money selling the vacuums that I was only working 3 weeks a month and I was going back down to FL every month on vacation. The owner had hired me as an independent contractor but the more money I earned, the more he wanted to throw the ropes on me. I was not going back inside the fence, so I rebelled against him and soon lost my job.

This pattern continued in like manner for the next decade. I always resisted being controlled by someone and I always found a way to deliver myself from the troubles I was in. It was easy for me to win other people over and to make things happen in my life. Of all the people in the Bible this part of me is most like Jacob. The more I succeeded the better I got, and over the years I developed a very high self-confidence and a strong faith in myself.

Pro 28:26 He who trusts in himself is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom is kept safe.

*Habakkuk 1:11 Then they sweep past like the wind and go on— **guilty men, whose own strength is their god.**"*

Resisting God's Brokenness

I had a good heart, and Father knew it, but I was filled with the fear of being controlled and losing my freedom. Like a wild stallion I just kept running so no one could ever throw the ropes on me again or fence me in. But, because I was in need and because I was naïve and without wisdom to discern the good or evil in people, I stopped running a few times and trusted others who appeared to be sincere about helping me, only to be betrayed or badly taken advantage of.

Father tried using many difficult people and employers like that to break me along the way, but I just wouldn't be broken. I was too strong and too stiff necked so I would simply manipulate the situations, rebel, or run away. I even had one boss who changed my pay plan ten times, exactly like Laban did to Jacob. My life circumstances were broken many times, but my heart always remained obstinate and unbroken. All I seemed to learn was to distrust others and instead to trust in myself even more.

Psalm 32:9 "Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you."

In my haste, I was missing His way (Pro 19:2). As a loving Father who disciplines his true children, he had almost a twenty-year plan to tie me up, enslave me, oppress me, and one day to completely break me and tear down everything I had built. In his loving foresight he had an iron cage waiting for me that I was never going to get out of until *He* got me out. This was the only way I was ever going to recognize my own limitations and humble myself enough to see and admit my deep need for Him and His deliverance.

It's the same principle behind why God allowed the Israelites to be enslaved and brutally treated by the Pharaoh, and it's the same reason he allows us to be enslaved by sins or by other people. Most of us have to be broken from our own self-will and self-sufficiency, and we all have to have a reason for deliverance before we can humbly cry out for the Deliverer.

Rom 11:32 "For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all."

It was going to take many years and lots of trials and pain and suffering, but one day I was going to know Him, not just as God Almighty who holds the stars in hands, but as my loving Father who holds my very life in His hands.

Gen 15:13-14 Then the LORD said to Abraham, "Know for certain that your descendants will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years...and afterward they will come out with great possessions."

Chapter 2

Maybe Marriage Will Stop the Chaos

I had met Jennifer one year earlier in the Summer of 1992, while we were both working at Ron Jon surf shop in Cocoa Beach, FL. That was the Summer break I had taken off from college because of the injury to my drawing finger. She was quiet, calm, and aloof and I was attracted to her almost immediately. I tried a few times unsuccessfully to approach her about going on a date, even leaving a note on her car one time at work, but she was just not interested in me. The end of the summer came and I left to go back to college at George Wallace State Community College in a small town just outside of Cullman, AL.

One year later in September of 1993, I had already dropped out of college due to that second injury on the construction site and I was now making my monthly trips back to Florida, since I was making all that money selling vacuum cleaners door to door. I had also recently been re-united with my long-time family friend John Barber and his wife, and we both wanted to get back into dirt bike riding.

John and Shelva Barber had lived next to my grandparents' house in Huntsville, AL since I was a small child, and I regularly spent time with them when I went to visit my grandparents. I loved them both like family and they would take me out with them to dinner and even buy me toys. Now that my parents were divorced and I was essentially a fatherless latch key kid, being chased home by bullies most days, my mother was anxious to find a male role model for me. She tried the Big brothers, Big Sisters program for a while, and then allowed John to begin fulfilling that role in my life.

On the Christmas of 1986, he and his wife, with my mom's permission, surprised me with a brand new 1987 Yamaha YZ 80 dirt bike. I was only 13 years old at the time and my mother and I were so poor that I was qualified for free school lunches and wearing off brand generic clothing which the other kids made fun of me for. Now, I had just received a brand-new dirt bike and it was a life changing event for me. John indeed became like a father figure and he started teaching me how to ride and work on the motorcycles. He

also taught me discipline and the importance of working and saving up money by moving lawns, so I could pay my race fees, and buy my own parts for the dirt bike.

It was like a dream come true and a second chance to re-capture the lost happiness and freedom from my childhood. The dirt biking gave me something to sink my teeth into at such a vulnerable time in my life, and my self-confidence began to increase. It also gave me relief from the bullies as some of the kids started respecting me now that I had a dirt bike and I had started racing. Racing motocross is certainly not for whimps. It is one of the toughest sports on the planet.

I was quite fearful and timid regarding things like this and I was given to be a quitter on things I wasn't good at right away. When I was first learning to how ride the dirt bike, I was following John down the trail and over various types of terrain. We came up to a very steep hill near this pit we had been riding in. It looked so intimidating to me, but since he went up it, so did I. About three quarters of the way up the hill, my dirt bike wheelied up and over and right back on top of me and I fell all the way back down the hill. I was scared to death and I felt like maybe this dirt biking thing just wasn't for me. I immediately wanted to quit. John came over and said, *"no we're not quitting...it's just like getting bucked off a horse...you have to just get right back up and do it again."* I nervously made another attempt and this time I made it. I was so relieved and felt so accomplished in that moment. My courage came back and it was a big life lesson for me actually. I did the thing I feared and the death of fear was the result.

Nevertheless, all this new life change and hope was about to end abruptly. One day, John and I were out riding on our trail near the Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, AL. My motorcycle was only an 80cc engine whereas he had a much larger 250cc engine. I complained to him that he was throwing up a bunch of roost (rocks and dirt) on my fingers and into my face from the back wheel of his motorcycle when we came around this one corner. Roost from a dirt bike tire can be very painful, even leaving welts and bruises.

I honestly don't recall how bad my complaining was, but I don't remember it being worthy of him losing it like he did. He got so mad at me, likening me to a sissy, telling me that what he threw on me was nothing compared to what I was going to experience as I moved up in the ranks racing with faster kids out on the motocross track. Unlike the last incident, where he gently encouraged me to try again, this time he snapped and became a different person. He yelled at me saying, *"That's it...we are done riding you little S!%*#. Get your a\$# back on that dirt bike and take it to the house."*

I remember feeling so hurt following him all the way back to the house on a ride of shame. I watched him sitting straight up on his motorcycle with his left hand on his hip just shaking his head almost the whole way back home. I leaned my dirt bike up against the wall in his carport and he told me to just go home. I was so confused and so hurt by all of this. It made me feel like there was something terribly wrong with me.

Just a few days after this incident, I heard my mother tell John on the phone, *"Michael is my son. If you want a son, have one of your own,."* and then she told me that I could not see him ever again until I was 18. I asked her why she was doing this and she would never give me an answer. Even though I was hurt by what John said and did, I was even more hurt that I was no longer going to be able to see him or go riding together any more. To me, that dirt bike had been a source of salvation in my life.

Six years later, when I was 19 years old I found John and Shelva and reconnected with them again. John and I both wanted to get back into riding and since I was earning a good bit of money selling vacuums I started looking to buy one. I found a great deal on one in Florida, so I went down to stay with my dad and step-mom again in Cape Canaveral, FL, while I made arrangements to pick up the motorcycle.

Jennifer had lived on the same street as my dad, so when I drove down the street, I saw that her car was still at the same apartments. I stopped and knocked on her door and she didn't even seem to remember me. I then saw her and her family at the beach a few times and finally I invited her to join my friend and I to go to the National Kidney Foundation Surfing Contest in Cocoa Beach, FL. She agreed to go and within one week, we were in love with each other.

Then I had to leave to go back to work in Alabama. I went by the public library where she was studying for school to tell her good bye and to assure her I'd be back soon and often. Since I had purchased a dirt bike and didn't want my mother to know about it, I made arrangements to leave it at John and Shelva's house on my return trip home.

I dropped off the dirt bike and spent the night with them. I received a call the next morning from my mother saying, "*Michael, there is a girl sitting on my couch named Jennifer and she is looking for you...is she pregnant son?*" I was shocked and a little afraid all at the same time. This almost felt like something a stalker would do. I assured my mother that Jennifer and I had just fallen in love the previous week but we had no sexual relations. With nothing more than the address of my grandparents' house in Grant, AL, Jennifer had decided to take some time off school and follow after me, some 650 miles away in Alabama. She stayed with my mom and I for a few days and then returned home to school.

I thought I could go back to Florida once a month to see her, but I soon lost that job selling vacuums and was now working in a car stereo electronics store. I no longer had the money or the freedom to go back and forth to Florida and I started making more and more unwise financial decisions. My mom found out about the dirt bike and we got into fights about money and she eventually kicked me out of the house. She started telling me that it seemed like I had a black cloud always flying over my head. I started moving around from house to house with several friends until I ended up having to live with my boss because I had nowhere else to go.

I was still spending money like I was making as much as I did when I sold the vacuums. It seemed like I was spending about \$1.50 for every dollar I earned. I was blowing it all on car stereo electronics and motorcycle stuff, even borrowing money from others to keep my head afloat. I couldn't see how sick it was at the time, but I just couldn't stop spending money. It was like a drug addiction perhaps. I had a very blindly optimistic and foolish attitude and I just kept justifying it all by saying that things would all work out somehow in the future.

This tendency to overspend had been there for several years. I remember when I was in college there was a time when I only had \$10 left for food and gas to get me through the rest of the week. I ended up at the music store and I couldn't stop myself from buying a \$7 tape that I just had to have, which left me only \$3 for food for several days. I would regularly make these kinds of terrible risky choices, throwing caution and prudence to the wind. I always counted on someone bailing me out, especially my mom, or on my being able to somehow work out a deliverance for myself.

I was still avoiding the obvious external evils and sins throughout this time, but I kept making these foolish decisions regarding my finances. One time during a long stay with John and Shelva, they approached me and asked me if they could share something they saw in me that was similar to something John was experiencing. That's when they began to tell me that John had been diagnosed with something called manic-depression or bipolar disorder and that he was taking medicine for it.

As they started explaining this was perhaps a medical condition I might have, they asked me if I was willing to visit John's Psychiatrist for an interview and possible diagnosis. Immediately, I felt some sick sense of relief that perhaps all my foolish choices were not really my fault. I agreed to go to the Psychiatrist and

realized that if I could just answer the questions properly, I could indeed be diagnosed as bipolar and then be able to say, *“All these foolish choices aren’t really my fault. I have a chemical imbalance that is making me live like this.”*

My friend, I wish to make a strong point here. I’m not dismissing all mental illness as spiritual issues, but I am dismissing 90% of it after having contact personally with thousands of people. As the rest of my testimony will clearly show, my problem was no more of a chemical imbalance than a drunk’s problem is his supposed *disease* of alcoholism. These are the lies and excuses we make up to justify living in our real problem which is called SIN and rebellion against God. We are liars and we hate calling sin, sin and we hate taking personal responsibility for our foolish and sinful choices. We refuse to come into the light of God’s word admitting our sinfulness, or forgiving those who have sinned against us. Instead we remain in the darkness and we lie to ourselves and say things like, *“I’m gay, or I have multiple affairs, or I’m attracted to children, because I was just born this way, or I have a chemical imbalance which makes me unable to keep a job, or to stop making outrageous purchases, or it causes me to suffer terrible anxiety or depression and that’s the reason I can’t live a normal life, or I have a disease called alcoholism which is why I can’t stop drinking and I inherited it from my father who was also a drunk.”*

In spite of the fact that the Bible clearly tells us in Deuteronomy 24:16, 1 Kings 8:32, Jeremiah 31:29-30, Ezekiel 18:3-4, 19-20, Mat 16:27, and John 9:2, God no longer passes on the sins of the Father’s to their children, so many still believe this generational curse lie. It too is an excuse to absolve someone from taking personal responsibility for their own choice to sin.

John 3:19-21 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. (20) Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. (21) But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.”

I am not a doctor or a Psychiatrist, but I have been in contact with and heard the raw personal stories of thousands of people from around the world about the darkest of their problems, torments and anxieties in their life. I have not spoken to a single person yet where I thought, wow, perhaps this person really needs to try medicine.

Out of probably more than two thousand stories and emails I have personally responded to with recordings over the last three years, there has not been one person who was in depression, anxiety, being tormented in their mind, or who had been diagnosed as bi-polar where it didn’t become obvious that there was some root of rebellion and sin in their heart.

I cannot think of a single person in thousands where I was not able to identify either a pornography or drug addiction, love of money, fear of man, dependence on man, or the most popular one unforgiveness either of someone else or themselves, or an outright unbelief and lack of trust in God. That’s why I can say with confidence that I wouldn’t doubt that 90% of so called “mental illness” has its root in spiritual problems and not in a chemical imbalance that needs to be mitigated by manmade trial and error medicines. Many professing Christians experiencing the symptoms of mental illness or anxiety have turned to these drugs. Rather than doing honest business with God about their sin and trusting Him for His grace and deliverance, they have turned to a manmade idol to have their needs met.

*Jonah 2:8 – Those who cling to worthless idols **forfeit** the grace that could be theirs.*

In Deuteronomy 28:28 and 28:65 God pronounced a curse of mental illness and mental anxiety on the Jews if they disobeyed him. In 1 Samuel 16, King Saul was mentally tormented by an evil spirit from God over

and over for his disobedience. In Daniel 4:33, King Nebuchadnezzar was struck by God with such a terrible mental illness that he was given the mind of animal and became like cattle, eating the grass of the field. In Matthew 18:34 Jesus said anyone who doesn't forgive his brother from his heart will be turned over to tormenters. In Mark 5 the Gerasene man was driven to such madness of mind by an evil spirit that he would cry out loud and cut himself with sharp stones. In Galatians 6:7, it says men reap what they sow; if they sow to the flesh they reap destruction. In 1 Corinthians 16:22, Paul pronounced a curse on all who do not love the Lord, and even though many think they love the Lord, God defines love as obedience to His commands (John 14:21-23, 1 John 5:3). The majority of mental illness, anxieties, and tormenting thoughts in the Bible are all connected to disobedience or not trusting God. True peace comes from getting our heart right with God, not from manmade pills and it takes faith to believe this. Let God be true and every man a liar.

Isa 26:3 You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.

Joh 14:27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

In rare exceptions, I can see God uses things like a messenger of Satan for Paul which was sent to torment him in 2 Corinthians 12:7, or Charles Spurgeon's battles with depression, as thorns in the flesh to keep his servants humble. However, it must be pointed out that these thorns in the flesh are not what characterized their lives. Their lives were characterized by steadfast faith, godliness, and an abundance of fruitfulness for the kingdom of God. Their thorns were used to keep them low, not to keep them ineffective.

Back to the story. That day at the Psychiatrist's office I answered all the all the questions successfully, do you have racing thoughts...do you have trouble sleeping at night...do you often feel unstoppable...do you spend money you shouldn't, etc. The correct answers were very predictable and he diagnosed me on the first visit as being bipolar. They prescribed a medicine and I started taking it.

It's been so long that I cannot remember how the medicine made me feel or exactly how long I kept taking it but I think it was less than three months. I never took medicine or went back to a Psychiatrist ever again.

I remember also around this time, I was indeed searching for answers about how to fix up my life. Somehow or another I came into possession of an audio tape by Dr. Wayne Dyer. I became so intrigued by how he spoke about God and the things he taught about how to live a life worth living. I kept listening to this tape series repeatedly, having no idea that this was all very anti-Christian dangerous New Age teaching. Indeed, God can use all things together for the good because through this tape series I at least started thinking more about God.

Jennifer and I had maintained a long-distance phone relationship for about 6 months and only saw each other one time when she came back to Alabama on a bus for a few days. Finally, I decided I needed to go to Florida to see if she was the one I was supposed to marry.

When I told my mother, I was leaving to move back to Florida, she told me she needed to meet me and tell me something first. We met at a Shoney's restaurant off Memorial Parkway in Huntsville, AL. She sat me down and then explained to me that she had been waiting until I turned twenty-one to tell me something but since I was leaving, she needed to tell me now. She told me that my father was not really my father and that John Barber was my father. I was shocked! It's one thing to find out your father is not your father, it's a whole other thing to find out one of your best friends who you ride dirt bikes with is really your father.

My mom and John had agreed to wait until I was twenty-one to tell me but since I was leaving AL they wanted me to know because John was interested in having that father and son relationship with me now.

He had wanted to tell me for years but didn't want to hurt my relationship with my dad Michael Chriswell, who raised me. This was such a bitter sweet moment for me. I found myself in a gigantic triangle of confusion and being pulled in three different directions towards my biological father, the father who raised me and now Jennifer.

In the end, I decided to stay with my decision to move to Florida. This crushed John so much that he rejected any type of a relationship with me from then on but it was a price I was willing to pay. I was so drawn to Jennifer amidst all this chaos in my life, because from the outside she appeared to be the righteousness and stability I was missing. As far as legalistic righteousness goes, she was faultless. She was a virgin, she didn't drink, didn't smoke or do drugs, didn't party, was a hard worker, and she stayed away from trouble.

Like Eve to the attractive fruit in the garden of Eden, I was being drawn into a trap because of what I saw with my eyes. I saw the sweet and clean looking nectar on the outside only to be lured into a caged prison like a Venus fly trap that would capture me and hold me until all the life was sucked out of me.

Our dating life was a complete disaster, but the fool in me naturally just kept going forward. There were car chases, yelling and screaming, throwing things, and multiple break ups. One time we had such a big fight that she broke up with me and threw all my clothes over the balcony and kicked me out of her apartment.

Within a few weeks of being gone, I began thinking that since things weren't working out with Jennifer, maybe it was because I was supposed to be back with my old high school girlfriend named Kristy from Alabama. She was my first real love and the one I had always thought I was going to marry. John and Shelva had also become friends with her and they had told me before I left for Florida that they thought she was the one I was supposed to marry, not Jennifer. Kristy got engaged a few years after high school but she never married the guy. When I asked her why, she said that she was afraid that five years into the marriage, she would still be thinking about me. That set off those sparks in me again and so we decided to meet each other half-way at a hotel in Georgia to see if we should be back together. Of course, one thing led to another and the flesh had its way.

However, upon departing we both realized that we really had nothing else in common anymore and we had both moved on in different directions in our lives. We decided not to pursue the relationship again. Sometime later, Jennifer and I got back together, but she didn't know that I had gone back and had this encounter with Kristy while we were broken up.

We moved back in together and eventually Jennifer got pregnant. Regretfully, in our spiritual ignorance and fear we opted for an abortion through Family Planning counseling. In my opinion, there was already a root of bitterness in Jennifer's heart from something in her past before I ever met her, but she would use these two events, my ex-girlfriend and the abortion, to justify her anger and resentment towards me throughout the rest of our marriage. There would be no forgiveness in her heart towards me ever, just a sweeping of it all under the rug.

Heb 12:15 See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

About a year after our marriage, she found a note Kristy had left in my glovebox which I never knew was there. Indeed, my sin had found me out (Num 32:23). She drove up to my retail store work place and started yelling and pounding on the store glass while I was in a meeting with all of my associates. I was in shock and could not believe the rage she was displaying in front of everyone, as if there was no one around.

When I got into the truck, she went into a rage screaming at me about the note. She turned sideways and started kicking me with all of her strength like a little kid throwing a temper tantrum. At one point, I noticed she had a kitchen knife behind the seat. I was so afraid of her out of control behavior that I lied and told her that Kristy and I had only just met with each other but there had been no sex.

There was no way I could keep this lie. I have never been able to do so, thank you God. When I was five years old, I went to the local store with my friends. We were all supposed to steal some candy. I joined in with them and stole a tootsie roll. As we left the store, I walked around the corner and I just couldn't do it. At five years old, all by myself, I walked back in that store and walked straight up to the counter and told the man I had stolen the candy and I was very sorry.

My mother says she only knows of one time I lied to her in my whole life. I stole her VCR and pawned it while I was in college because I was desperate for money. When she asked about it, I lied hoping I could get it out of pawn before she found out. Now, this lie about my ex-girlfriend was eating me up inside. My conscious was screaming for relief such that even though I knew she was going to flip out, I needed the relief of being freed from the lie. I worked with a guy for years who I knew had cheated on his wife one time and as far I know he has never told her. I often wondered how in the world he could sleep at night with that lie for so many years. He must have seared his conscience as with a hot iron.

We were in our third-floor apartment when I finally told Jennifer the truth one day and apologized. She again went into a rage, throwing the ironing board down the hall at me and into the wall. She ran downstairs and kicked over my \$6,000 motorcycle right off its kickstand and onto the pavement. She was screaming so loud that the neighbors called the police thinking someone was killing someone.

No matter how many times I apologized and no matter how many times I reminded her that she had broken up with me and kicked me out of her apartment when this happened, it did not matter to her. No matter what I did or said, she would never forgive me for this for the rest of our marriage. It came up over and over in many arguments. The devil had outwitted us both and this unforgiveness in her became a bitterness that destroyed her and our marriage.

Just like Saul's disobedience brought the torment of evil spirits in 1 Sam 16, who were then used to torment David, this bitterness in her heart invited the torment of devils into her life which would torment me for the next fourteen and half years.

Jesus warned about this very thing happening in the following passage.

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" (22) Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. (23) "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. (24) As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. (25) Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. (26) "The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' (27) The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. (28) "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. (29) "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' (30) "But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. (31) When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened. (32) "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. (33) Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as

*I had on you?' (34) **In anger his master turned him over to the jailers (KJV – tormenters) to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.** (35) "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart." - Mat 18:21-35 NIV*

This is one of the reasons why forgiveness is so crucial for Christians. We all hurt each other and we all make terrible mistakes, **but the greater sin is not to forgive those who sin against us.** That brings death and torment to our hearts and invites the demons of hell into our life as fair game.

*2Corinthians 2:10-11 If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him. **in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.***

I had become convinced that if I just married Jennifer all the problems and fighting would finally stop. It was a marriage made in hell, but allowed by God for very good reasons. He had indeed let me put the rope around my own neck, which He was now going to use to oppress and control me for a decade and a half.

I was a good-hearted fool who wouldn't be tamed and she was a stone hearted Pharisee who had to be the ruler. I was zealous, careless, foolish, ignorant and driven. She was judgmental, demanding, unforgiving, unyielding, and unbreakable. She never forgave me from her heart for any of my mistakes and she would do anything to control me, even lie and falsely accuse me.

After many years of marriage, the only way for me to keep the peace was to always be the one to say, "I'm sorry" and even to take responsibility for things I never did. She had a snake in her heart, but just as Christ said of the Pharisees, you couldn't see it from the outside. She grew up in a family that had mastered image management but at the forsaking of true internal righteousness.

1 Samuel 16:7 The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

Chapter 3

The Battle for Control in the Marriage

Psalms 66:11-12 You brought us into prison and laid burdens on our backs. You let me ride over our heads; we went through fire and water.

The day we got married in 1995, Jennifer went into a rage at the Disney staff because one of the servers at the restaurant accidentally spilled a glass of water on her grandmother. She made such a scene that they comp'd our entire \$3,000 dinner party and bought new clothes and jewelry for the grandmother. To me, looking back on that moment, I think it must be what it feels like when a prisoner first hears the slamming of the bars and the clicking of the lock behind him that seals the fate of his freedom. Indeed, God knew exactly what it was going to take to break the wild, foolish, and untamed horse in my heart.

Our marriage was going to be a constant power struggle. I had been the ruler of my life until that point and simply rebelled against anyone who tried to take over my rule. Now she was the ruler and I was not only married to her but was also going to have five children with her. She was the new boss, no matter how much I didn't like it, because she was so much stronger and harder than me. We only had peace when I, the one who was afraid of being controlled, submitted and allowed her to be in control. When I challenged or acted independent of Jennifer's will, her anger would build like a volcano and eventually blow.

I find it so encouraging that this exact same principle applies to our relationship with God. We will only have peace with Him when we, the ones who are afraid of giving up control, submit to Him and allow Him to be in complete control. Since many of us are so stubborn and stiff necked, refusing to fully submit to the Father of our spirits, He is pleased to use others to break us and bring us to that point. Just like how the Israelites were in submission to Pharaoh, God will sometimes allow others to have that almost “Pharaoh like” control over our lives until we are so broken that we cry out to Him in total trust and submission.

In spite of what the Genesis 3:16 curse says about a woman’s desire being for her husband and that he will rule over her, it was just the opposite with Jennifer. Her desire was indeed for her husband, but it was not the desire for love or sex or babies, but rather a desire to rule over and control me for her own benefit. It’s no secret that many women give into fear and then try to control their husbands rather than submitting to them as God desires them to do, and putting all their trust in God to do his work in their husband’s heart.

1Pe 3:1-6 Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, (2) when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. (3) Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. (4) Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. (5) For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, (6) like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.

I wish to point out that when the Bible speaks of a woman submitting to an unbelieving husband, this does not mean God would have her submit to him in any evil way that would violate the word of God, or her conscience, or in any way that would prevent her from worshipping God. An example would be a husband who tries to force his wife to watch pornography, to lie, to cheat, or steal, or who tells her to stop reading the word, or to stop praying or talking about Jesus. Let us remember what happened to Sapphira when she submitted and went along with her ungodly husband Ananias, in Acts 5:1. Also, remember that Jesus said He did not come to bring peace, but a sword, and that anyone who loves their family members or spouse more than Him, is not worthy of Him. See Mat 10:34-39 and Luke 14:26.

Some women try to control their husbands instinctively out of their own fear and insecurities. They feel if they don’t try to control their husbands they might lose some part of their welfare or personal comfort. This is a sin of rebellion against God’s design for marriage, and of unbelief and disobedience to the word of God, but the good news is that it can be repented of once a wife recognizes she is doing it.

Also, let me point out that a truly godly husband or wife will humbly seek the Father’s specific will and guidance for their unique marriage situation. It is important to receive the Holy Spirit’s personal guidance, wisdom, and timing regarding important matters like this. Be careful about putting your finger on a verse or allowing someone else to say, “*Look, here’s the Bible says, so this is what you should do right here.*” That person has no idea what God’s unique plan and timing is in your life.

James 1:5, 5:13 - If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray.

For many controlling wives, I suspect their desire is more for self-preservation, than it is self-empowerment so they can intentionally rule over their husbands. I believe many of these women would love to have a husband who they could trust to lead them as their spiritual authority and head, but instead they are married to someone who is presently spiritually impotent. Thus, their fear drives them to control their spouse, believing the outcome is up to them, rather than God.

This was not the case with Jennifer however, any more than it was the case with Jezebel in 1 Kings. Jezebel ruled over Ahab, and Jennifer ruled over me because these kinds of women have a lust for power. Again, a Jezebel type wife was exactly what Father knew I needed in my life, but I of course didn't understand this when I was going through it, and it not only made no sense, but it was excruciatingly frustrating. I was still convinced God was looking for Jennifer to submit to me, but actually God was looking for me to submit to Him.

More than money or material possessions, it seems to me that the heart of a Pharisee lusts after power and control. They gain the power by attempting to live at such a high level of legalistic self-righteousness that there is no way you can match them, and thus you are beneath them and become subject to them. They look down on you and point out how you are nothing like them because they have an evil desire to control you. Because of my own strong fear of being controlled, the battles for control between us were ugly and intense. The fights would escalate to the point of me accusing her of having a serious anger problem, that I believed was connected to something hidden in her childhood, and then her in turn accusing me of being bipolar, reminding me of my "diagnosis" back when I was nineteen.

I was able to defend myself quite well with words in our arguments, so to keep the power and control over me, she would go after my Achilles heel. More than anything, I hated being falsely accused of something I didn't do, or of being re-crucified for mistakes I made in the past. Think Kryptonite to Superman. Again, my Father was afflicting me in his faithfulness so that one day I would obey Him. When I wouldn't submit to her, she would fire off in disgust a detailed list from the last 10 years or more of every mistake I ever made. She would lie to me and accuse me of doing the very things she had done, like the story about the affair which I will share later in the story.

She would repeatedly accuse me of being a loser husband, a loser dad, a sex-addict because I thought weekly intimacy was important, a bad provider, a bad business owner, a bad chooser of friends, and several other things. If I was especially persistent in defending myself, out would come the "*you cheated on me with your ex-girlfriend,*" card, which was referring to the story I shared in the previous chapter. After years of hearing the same accusations hammered into me over and over, I actually began to doubt myself. I started to wonder if maybe I really was guilty of all these things. I started thinking, "*maybe I am the source of all her problems...maybe I am a loser...maybe I am a bad provider...maybe I am bipolar.*"

Incidentally, she did this same thing with our oldest son Tyler who has had some learning challenges. She homeschooled him a good bit when he was younger and she called him an idiot and said he was stupid enough times that now even as a teenager he has told me of his struggles with thinking he really is stupid. When I saw what he could do with his memory inside of a Lego marvel hero video game when he was like 7 or 8 years old, I was shocked and praised God! Sure, he was struggling with learning English and math at the same pace and in the same way as others, but that boy was anything but the stupid child she had called him.

All of this evil was coming from a woman who was baptized in the name of Jesus Christ when she was seven years old, who grew up in a "Christian" family surrounded by generations of professing believers, none of whom had ever divorced, and all who rarely if ever missed church.

I tried explaining to her one time that even if I was absolutely 100% guilty of all these things she was accusing me of, and even if I had done them all intentionally, where is it becoming of a true Christian to speak and behave like this towards me as her husband.

Mat 12:33-37 "Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. (34) You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good?"

For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. (35) The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. (36) But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. (37) For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."

Here is what I find so fascinating and ironic about all of this evil that was coming at me from her. In my mind, at this time, I was always a good guy, and especially because I was avoiding the known external sins. I'm not aware of anyone who could come forward and honestly say I have intentionally or maliciously tried to do harm to them, or that I ever even tried to pick a fight with them. I don't care how holier than thou it sounds, it's just not in me to do it, and it's the truth. Of course, there are plenty who have been indirectly hurt by my foolish choices, or those who got hurt when I tried to defend myself from them attacking me first and that's still sinful on my part, but my nature is to be a peacemaker, not a fighter. I didn't go back and try to beat the bullies up who beat me up, instead I attempted and succeeded in making some of them my friends. I simply do not initiate attacking or hurting other people verbally, emotionally or otherwise.

However, much to my shame, the evil in her started to expose my own evil which was deep in my heart.

Mat 5:20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

I may have looked good to most on the outside, including myself, but now my evil was being exposed at the heart level and it was obvious that my righteousness had not surpassed that of the Pharisees and teachers of the Law. When Jennifer would keep oppressing me, stonewalling me, yelling at me, accusing me and treating me with such contempt, instead of responding like Jesus would, I would eventually explode right back at her with the same venomous anger and hate and cuss words that she was screaming at me. I could see that I had the same exact capacity for evil in my heart, as she did in hers, but there was a critical spiritual difference between us.

When the evil in my heart was exposed, I always felt remorse and had no peace in my heart. Even though I knew I was mostly defending myself from her attacks, I could still never return wrong for wrong, without feeling terrible remorse, and eventually apologizing to both her and God. Nevertheless, even though I was a sincere born-again believer in Jesus Christ, and even though I hated this sin in my heart, the evil I did not want to do, that I kept on doing. I was trapped in Romans 7, but I wouldn't realize that or understand it for many more years. I had the willingness and the determination to stop reacting back to her like that, but I did not have the ability. The power to do so only comes from God's internal grace to the heart, which I wrote about in the beginning of the book. God knew me well and He wasn't going to set me free from her, or my own sin in this area, until I was ready to fully surrender and submit to Him. For God to have given me freedom from either at that point, would have been to give me freedom from Him, as well.

My roots in God were so shallow at that time that I can say with confidence that I would have surely flown the coop and drifted right back into the corrupt world I desperately needed to escape. None of what I was going through made sense to me at the time. It all seemed like senseless, madness and God didn't explain to me what He was doing either. I was walking in the dark regarding His ways, but God was indeed working all things together for my good because I loved Him and was called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28).

Isa 55:8-9 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. (9) "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Psalm 119:67,71 - "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word. It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees.

God consistently used her to push me way past my own strength and ability to keep my own sins down. The thing that caused the most suffering to me was not the evil things she said and did to me, it was my uncontrollable evil responses back to her. I would get so frustrated with myself each time I reacted back to her knowing how many times I had resolved not to do it. This was by far the deepest affliction for me.

I tried everything to suppress my evil responses to her; I would ignore it, run away from it, go ride my dirt bike, read the Bible, listen to worship music, throw myself into work, play with the children, go for a walk, etc. God was allowing me to fail over and over in my own strength. He wanted to help me to see and to eventually admit that in His eyes, I was not the good guy that I always thought I was. I was no better than a Jew trying to keep the Law of Moses under the Old Covenant at this point. I knew the rules and what I was supposed to do, but I just couldn't do it; she was able to continually bring out the worst in me.

God was revealing more and more of my own sin, and even more my own weakness to overcome it. This oppressive force was eventually going to create a strong desire to be free of it and that's when I would see God's mercy.

Romans 11:32 For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.

No matter how hard I tried, it was going to be years before I would understand what it truly meant to be delivered of sin and to live free by the Holy Spirit as a Romans 8 son, rather than a Romans 7 slave. I thank God so much for caring enough about me to afflict me and save me from the self-righteousness that I couldn't even see in my heart.

The hate towards sin in the heart and the desire to be free of it, was not there with Jennifer. She was free of sin on the outside, but not on the inside. It's as if she no longer had a conscience or the ability to feel true remorse for her actions. The children of God and the children of the devil, or the wheat and the tares, the sheep and the goats, the Isaac's and the Ishmael's, they both start out doing evil and are both guilty of sin. The true children of God however, once awakened by the grace of the Lord, are able to see and hate their own sin, and upon submitting their spirits to God, through Christ, they can come to full repentance. The children of the devil live according to the flesh and have no desire for repentance. They do not submit their spirits to God, nor are they able to do so (John 8:44, Rom 8:7, Eph 2:2, 1 Pet 2:8).

1 John 3:7-8,10 Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother.

None of us are surprised when a child grows up believing about himself, what his godless parents have called him, but I was an adult and Jennifer's verbal assaults were deeply affecting me. It's like the innocent person who confesses to a crime they didn't commit because they were broken down with so much psychological manipulation. She would burn me down with painful accusations and then completely ignore me for days as if I didn't even exist. Eventually, I'd be so broken by it and so desperate for some sort of peace, I would submit to her again and again. Without exaggeration, I did this hundreds of times over the sixteen and half year relationship.

Her ability to feel no compassion or empathy was beyond perplexing to me and actually became fascinating to witness. I wasn't even able to steal a tootsie roll from a store when I was five years old, without it eating

me alive inside and then having to take it back, but even as a wife and mother she could lie so convincingly well that I think she truly believed she was telling the truth. I don't recall ever seeing a time where she felt her conscience was violated, or that she had any responsibility in our troubles at all. Some people like to use the man-made Psychological labels of narcissist or sociopath to label this type of person, but I prefer to go back three thousand years, to the source of God's word, where the Holy Spirit described people like this in detail in chapters like Psalm 10 and 73.

I was clever, but she was cleverer. I was stubborn and unyielding, but she was more stubborn and more unyielding. None of the tactics I had used for years to maintain control and freedom with others worked with her. She was like an immovable granite rock. The fact was, I still wasn't wise enough or broken enough to give up trusting in my own self for deliverance, so Father was pleased to let it get even worse.

Joshua 11:20 For it was the LORD himself who hardened their hearts to wage war against Israel

Rom 9:18 God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

I still hadn't run out of my own creative ideas and I was far from giving up this fight. Another tactic I tried using to save myself from this oppression of hers was distraction. In the hopes of getting Jennifer to take her focus off devouring me, I tried getting her involved in our businesses, women's bible studies, finding her a friend, starting a hobby, starting a ministry, etc., but none of it worked. She always came back to oppress and control me, and no matter what I said, she would not listen.

1 Kings 12:15 So the king did not listen to the people, for this turn of events was from the LORD.

In the 14.5 years I was married to her, she never had a single friend she ever pursued or spent any time with. Even late in the marriage, the only contact she had with ladies was through the wives of *my* friends who came to our children's parties or school functions. She simply would not engage with others in any meaningful way. No one knew this woman in any significant way and I was literally her only project. Even having five children did not change her focus from ruling over me.

I couldn't help but to see a part of my first marriage in the movie *Life of Pi*, when he is trapped at sea in a small boat with a hungry angry tiger. There's a desperate scene in the movie when the Tiger is about to eat him and all of a sudden, a bunch of flying fish end up jumping into the boat with them. After they fight over one big tuna fish that jumped in the boat, the Tiger turns to gorge on the fish and leaves Pi alone. Much like Pi, I discovered that the only times I had peace was when I could fill our boat with fish for the hungry Tiger. When I was winning in my career or business, and the money was jumping in our boat so to speak, we had several times of peace. She was happy when I was winning, and she *despised* me when I failed.

If I did well and had a victory, she wanted to share in it as my partner, but when I failed she wanted nothing to do with me or the loss. The only way to make peace with her was to put my tail between my legs and to falsely accept responsibility for *everything* each time. Without fear of being dramatic, I believe I heard "I'm sorry" less than five times in sixteen and a half years of knowing her, without me coaxing it out of her, and I'm not sure any of those were sincere. This was the pattern on and off for our entire marriage.

Money was the only thing I found that brought me any relief from her. Just like Pharaoh wanted more bricks from the Israelites to maintain his lavish empire, she wanted more income from me to build and maintain our lavish lifestyle. Most of our fights and her complaints were about money, so naturally that is where I put more focus to solve our problems. It was like I was thinking if I could just get and keep enough "fish in this boat", I could survive and live at some level of peace and happiness in this marriage.

What I experienced in that marriage I have sadly seen in a documentary about the Gelada monkeys that live high atop the mountains in Ethiopia. The males look like a cross between a baboon and a male lion. They are large monkey and quite impressive looking. The dominate male was called Braveheart and he was the king over a family of about 400 monkeys. However, he only remains the king as long as the queen and her sisters say he remains the king. If his performance as a provider for the family drops, so does his position as king.

After four years of being the king and protecting his queen and family from attacks and other suitors, he began to relax a little. He failed to stop a fight one time between the sisters and the queen came up and screamed at him and smacked him in his face right in front of everyone. Twice her size, he remained absolutely silent and simply kept his head low in shame. It didn't take long before the queen had sex with one of the outside bachelor males, right out in the open, to motivate Braveheart and let him know he was close to being replaced if he didn't step back up and perform.

He rallied back and fought the intruding male and won her favor back. However, as soon as he drops his performance he will be quickly and easily discarded without any sense of remorse and the new male will come in and kill his offspring. In the animal world, there is very little sacrificial love; it's all about instinct and survival. In truth, this story is exactly what happened in my first marriage, including the affair on her part with a wealthy employer, at a time when I was struggling to consistently provide for us. It is very clear that we who are not in Christ and walking by the Spirit, are walking and living by our natural instincts which makes us no different than the godless wild animals.

2 Peter 2:12 They are like brute beasts, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like beasts they too will perish.

Chapter 4

Network Marketing, Motivational Speaking, Jail and a Car Accident

Before my first real job, I was that simple-minded kid who mowed lawns and washed cars to earn my money. I remember the satisfaction and dignity I would feel upon receiving a nice crisp \$20 bill in my hands after several hours of hard work detailing someone's car in the hot sun. I took pride in my work and I couldn't wait to buy something nice with my hard-earned money.

I got my very first real job in 1988 while attending the 9th grade of high school in Cocoa Beach, FL. I worked at a seafood restaurant in Port Canaveral called Captain Ed's. I was a bus boy, cleaning all the dirty dishes off the tables and even doing some dish washing in the kitchen from time to time.

The most memorable and ironic highlight from that job came one evening when a woman found a pearl in one of her oysters. As she was digging it out, it shot out and fell under the table somewhere. I volunteered to help them find it. I grabbed a flash light and climbed under their table searching through all the crumbs and leftover food particles that end up under busy restaurant tables. I looked everywhere and went back and forth several times confident it had to be under there but I couldn't find it.

I crawled out from under the table so disappointed, and so was she. Just as I was about to say I'm sorry and walk away, I wondered if it could have possibly fallen behind her seat cushion and into the wooden cabinet that it sits on. I pulled up her seat cover and there it was, a fine pearl indeed. Everyone was so

happy and the guests and employees standing around all started clapping. The lady was so appreciative that she gave me a \$20 bill for finding it. It was exciting to see someone find a pearl in their oyster, but to me, that \$20 was more valuable than that pearl because it gave me the ability to quickly satisfy my desires. I cannot help but seeing that as an illustration of how for so many years I found more much more value and pleasure in money than I did in searching for and finding the pearl of great price which I now have. Money can provide an instant benefit, whereas the pearl of great price takes a great deal of time and sacrifice to be found and cultivated into something valuable.

Mat 13:45-46 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. (46) When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

My second job is where I got my very first exposure to sales. It was during the summer of 1989 in Highlands, NC. I had just finished up the last six months of my 10th grade year at Edgewater High School in Orlando, Florida. I moved with my mother and my new step-father to this very small but wealthy mountain town, where I was supposed to start the 11th grade. I had moved in with them over the Christmas break of my 10th grade year, after I got kicked out of my dad's house in Cape Canaveral, FL. I had discovered my step-mother's long-time cocaine addiction and I had been rebelling against her even to the point of running away from home one time.

That Summer in Highlands, I took a part-time job at a local oriental rug dealer called Shiraz Oriental rug company. I helped with various tasks around the store like cleaning and moving the rugs around, but I found myself very interested in becoming knowledgeable about the rugs so that I too could talk to the customers like an expert. My broken childhood left me with a strong desire to feel valuable. I couldn't consciously understand it or see it at the time, but I was driven at a deep level to find the human love and acceptance I once had and lost.

I would listen in when the owners, two brothers from Iran, were explaining about the different countries, fabrics, knot counts, and ages of the rugs, to the customers. The more I learned about them, the more I wanted to be able to share my knowledge with the customers.

John 12:43 for they loved praise from men more than praise from God.

Soon, they began allowing me to show some of the rugs to customers, and I did so with a great deal of enthusiasm. To see someone buy something very expensive which you have recommended, was a great thrill and mental high for me which felt incredible. My step-father was a self-made millionaire in a business he created to match high caliber employees with large companies. He told me emphatically one day that I only had three choices for a career. He said I could either be an actor, a lawyer, or a salesperson. That statement planted a seed in my mind and was a catalyst in my career choices for years to come.

Now, with my first small taste of sales at Shiraz, I found myself being excited and fulfilled. Soon, I knew more about the rugs than most of the people coming in. Because the rugs were perceived as being valuable, my knowledge of them made me feel valuable. The highlight of this job was when they let me do a small stitch repair on a very old Persian rug worth over \$40,000. I smile when I look back and see how important these kinds of things were to me as a young man. I had a good heart, but I was all flesh and natural instinct.

By the time I got through college I had a variety of other jobs. I spent two summers working as a laborer in home construction and I was a floor guard at a skating rink. I even spent a few weeks saying, "Welcome to the border, may I take your order" at a Taco bell drive thru in Cullman, AL until I landed a job loading the UPS trucks at the Hartselle, AL distribution center.

Then in the Summer of 1992, I sold surfboards and sunglasses at Ron Jon surf shop in Cocoa Beach, FL. This is where I met Jennifer who also worked there but who wouldn't have anything to do with me for another year. I committed two terrible sins while working at Ron Jon's that didn't fully register at the time because of my carnality and my denial.

An attractive girl I worked with started talking to me in very flirtatious ways making sexual innuendos to me even though she was married. I was already a joker and didn't take her seriously at first but she kept pursuing me. She told me she was married but that her husband was in the military and was stationed somewhere else for a time. She spoke openly about the marriage being a mistake, saying he was a drunk who had abused her often. I was only nineteen years old and my flesh was stirred up and enticed by its evil desires. That's when I think I justified in my mind that their marriage didn't really count because they married so young and because he had been abusive to her. She persisted in flirting with me and I eventually gave into her flirtatiousness and had an adulterous relationship with her for several weeks.

I think it was probably a few years before I came out of my denial and fully realized my guilt and shame of adultery. I wonder how many terrifying moments of condemnation I felt over several years, all so I could temporarily gratify the evil desires of my flesh.

Pro 5:3-5 For the lips of an adulteress drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil; (4) but in the end she is bitter as gall, sharp as a double-edged sword. (5) Her feet go down to death; her steps lead straight to the grave.

This wasn't my only sin while working at Ron Jon's. I also used my employee discount to help a friend buy some clothes for himself, which was against company policy. Just as I justified the affair in my mind, I now justified my employee theft as being no big deal because the store was doing \$40,000,000 in annual sales and I was only trying to help a friend save a little money. It's no surprise when heathens live like this, but it's a terrible shame that I was doing these things while thinking I was a saved Christian.

After that came the job I had in Huntsville, AL selling Filter Queen vacuum cleaners door to door. I consider this to be my first real sales job. It was 100% commission with an intense sales environment focused on motivating us to earn more money. This is also where I got my first taste of cold calling. We would be dropped off in neighborhoods each carrying a forty-pound demo kit. We could either walk around and melt in the heat, or figure out how to get someone to accept a small gift to let us in to do our sales pitch. We called it, "getting knocked in" and I had no idea of the amazing high I was about to experience doing this, in spite of my fears of rejection. To walk up to a complete stranger's house, knock on their door, get them to invite me in their home, and then walk out 90 minutes later with a check for nearly \$1,500 was absolutely thrilling. It gave me a feeling of power in my life which I had never known so far.

Making a sale like this and earning several hundred dollars in commission gave me such an adrenaline rush. Also, there was the tremendous praise from the owner and office staff about my sales abilities. This was the exact type of love and acceptance my wounded soul was so hungry for. I loved watching my sales units climb on the company board for everyone to see. Soon, it was no longer about just making a good income, it was about the pride of being the top sales person and about securing all the love and adoration for myself. I quickly became the top sales person in the Southeast United States and was recognized in the industry newsletter.

I was consistently earning about \$1200 to \$1,500 per week at 19 years old. I bought myself a new car, loaded it with an obnoxious custom stereo system, and because I was an independent contractor, I was taking weeklong vacations each month to go back down to FL. I ran back into and started dating Jennifer

on one of those trips, where I had gone down to buy a dirt bike. After dating long distance for six months, I went back to FL and moved in with her, to see if she was the one I was “supposed” to marry.

I first moved into Jennifer’s Cape Canaveral apartment sometime around March of 1994. I still considered myself a Christian but the fire I once had for Christ back in the 10th grade had been choked off by all my other cares in this world. I don’t remember attending church anywhere and I wasn’t reading the Bible. For quite a while I didn’t even have a job and Jennifer had to help me make some of my car payments. This was embarrassing to me after the income I had been making just a year earlier, and the pressure to find a nice income and prove my worth became great. One time, I signed up for an offer on TV that if you come to this conference you can get a guaranteed government job with all these great benefits and pay. I paid a bunch of money, only to later find out we had been scammed. I was humiliated.

I still had the same dirt bike which I had come down to buy in Florida almost two years earlier. I cleaned it up and kept it in the empty dining room of the second story condo we were now living in. Even though we had so many troubles in our relationship and in building a life, I remember feeling so happy when I would walk in and just see that dirt bike sitting in the house. It made me feel like everything was going to be ok. I even had Jennifer take pictures of me sitting on it while it was in the house, like it was some kind of beloved family member.

I would often go down and lust over the new model motorcycles at the Beach Sportcycles Yamaha dealership in Cocoa, FL. A happy future life for me at that time would have been one where I could go riding every weekend, and a dream life would have been one where one day I owned my own private motocross track. I almost never stopped thinking about it, and I loved it with all my heart.

My spiritual eyes were blinded to the disgusting idolatry that was in my heart. I had such a strong emotional attachment to motocross because I associated it with having a father figure in my life and feeling like I was a man, and also the protection it gave me from the bullies as a vulnerable teenager. In a very real way, that dirt bike had felt like a savior to me and it had become a false god to save me from my troubles.

1 John 2:15-17 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (16) For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. (17) The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

I am so ashamed of looking back on how I lived while considering myself a believer in Jesus Christ and worthy of eternal life. I was completely blinded by my love of money and the world system, which Satan rules over. Going to the motorcycle dealership and buying something felt to me what I might imagine going to the bar feels like for an alcoholic. I hung around the dealership enough that eventually they offered me a job working on the weekends, where I sold motorcycles and personal watercraft.

After this I had a job for about 6 months selling telephone headsets over the phone. I really didn’t like the job and was fired due to poor performance. After that I got a job selling car stereo systems at what was once a major Florida electronics retailer called Sound Advice. The job was part salary and part commission and I was regularly one of the top mobile electronics sales people, but the money was never enough for me after having tasted the higher commissions of selling those vacuums.

Sadly, I even remember being envious of one of my customers who could buy whatever he wanted after being electrocuted while working construction on a new Wal-Mart and receiving a large settlement. I remember thinking how lucky he was to have had that accident and then to have gotten all that money. What I felt in my heart for money was nothing short of lust from God’s perspective.

Ecc 5:10 Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless.

I was convinced that if I could just figure out how to make more money, Jennifer would see me as a good provider and we could both be happy. As a professing Christian, I was about to start heading further and further in the wrong direction and towards becoming enslaved by the money god.

Heb 13:5 Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

I was earning a decent paycheck at Sound Advice, but I was not content and neither was Jennifer, and that's why I was so susceptible when one of my customers told me about a network marketing company they were making a bunch of money in. This became a cross roads in my life where I had a choice between contentment, or chasing after just a little bit more money. Someone once said, "*How much money is enough...just a little bit more.*"

In spite of the fact that just a year or two earlier I swore I would never join another MLM after our first experience with Amway, here I was signing up for another one because I loved money and was never content. This becomes the starting point of a life pierced with so many griefs that I would give anything if I could go back to myself in my early twenties and say, "*Please, I beg you...listen to me young man. I have lived your life and there's a much better way. I want you to read this passage in 1 Timothy and meditate on it every day for the next month, asking God to give you understanding and the ability to heed its warnings. I can tell you with absolute certainty that this is exactly what is about to start happening in your life, but you have a choice and it doesn't have to be this way if you choose wisely.*"

1 Timothy 6:6-10 But godliness with contentment is great gain. (7) For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. (8) But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. (9) People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. (10) For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

The wise choice would have clearly been to seek godliness with contentment, but I can see that I needed to learn about my foolishness and God's mercy by difficult experience. I believe I was so stubborn and so determined that He needed to just let me go and have the firsthand experience of taking my mental and emotional inheritance and seeing what kind of life I could make for myself with it. I needed to be free to go prodigal.

The network marketing company was called STS, Strategic Telecom Systems. They sold customized pre-paid phone cards and had created a huge collector trade from limited edition phone cards. I was told that the founders were Christians and between that and the, "*this isn't about money, this is about helping other people*" spiel, I had enough justification in my conscience to do it again.

Soon, I was attending local meetings at the Crealde business center in Winter Park, FL where I met David Bartels, a very passionate and articulate presenter of the STS business plan. I was drawn to David because of his humor and enthusiasm and more importantly because he had money. David and I hit it off well and he in turn introduced me to George Boomer. George was a retired car dealer who lived in a huge house and once owned Magic Isuzu, the largest volume Isuzu dealership in the country, and David was still a top producing Sales Manager at Courtesy Auto Group.

Both of them were already financially successful and yet they were really excited about this MLM company. I was drawn to them both because I thought if I just hung around them I could learn how to make a lot of

money like them. I wanted to be their disciples because clearly they knew how the money god worked. George, put a great deal of focus on the collector card side of the business, so I too started buying hundreds of collectible cards and going to trade shows with him to sell them.

The money started flowing in immediately and I was hooked! It was so easy and I was having so much fun buying and selling the cards that it became almost like what a gambling high must feel like. I just kept dreaming about all the money I was going to make from this, and how happy Jennifer and I would be with all the new things we could buy and do. I kept buying more and more cards and of course I never thought it would end, until it did. STS ended up being found guilty of some type of fraud and suddenly I had thousands of dollars in phone cards that were all worthless. After several years of keeping them in a closet, just hoping I could maybe sell them one day, I finally had to throw them all in the garbage.

Proverbs 13:11(NLT) Wealth from get-rich-quick schemes quickly disappears; wealth from hard work grows over time.

My hopes for lasting peace with Jennifer were gone too. She came right back at me and started blaming me once again for all the loss and the strained finances we were now again facing. I started feeling so hopeless and desperate for a sense of direction that one day I broke down and called one of the psychic hotlines that were being advertised on the T.V. I praise God that I cannot remember a single word that woman said to me, because by doing that, I was knocking on the devil's door and saying, "Hey, I need some answers for my life Satan." Oh, how I thank God that he overlooked so much of my spiritual ignorance and darkness.

However, all hope was not lost for long because soon after the network marketing company fell apart, David called and offered me another job. He was going on the road to promote and sell seminar tickets for a very successful sales trainer in the automobile business. David assured me that with proper training, I would be great at this and could make a bunch of money and more than recover my losses from the phone cards. I was nervous about quite a few things, but I was anxious to get back up and make a bunch of money to prove myself.

Motivational Indoctrination

David had recruited several other people to join the team, and the owner/speaker flew in for an introduction to himself and his company so we could decide if we wanted to be a part of it. He was the most charismatic, intelligent, well-read, confident, outspoken, motivational, and successful person I had ever met in my young life. I was absolutely blown away by this guy's passion, success, and his motivational vision of getting people to live and work at what he called a Level 10 life. He showed us flyers of him sharing the stage with other famous speakers like Coach Lu Holtz and Ken Blanchard.

He told us all kinds of incredible and inspirational stories like how his football dreams were shattered in his very first game as the starting quarterback for LSU football team because a linebacker hit his knee so hard that even after five surgeries he could never play again. Or the story of when he was asked to give the Championship winning Chicago Bulls team a pep talk before one of their winning games and that Dennis Rodman was so pumped up that he thought he was going to start taking notes on himself.

He even passed around a book full of photocopied five-figure checks, from car dealerships all over the country who he had done training for. Then he gave us all copies of the book he wrote about the life lessons his grandfather had taught him every morning when he was young. And most importantly, he spoke about his wife and kids, and about God. I thought to myself, "Wow, here is a successful man who has millions

and he is also a Christian. This could be such a wonderful opportunity for me to be successful by learning from him...a real God send."

After leaving his meeting that day at the hotel, I stepped into the elevator and found myself standing with Whitney Houston and Bobby Brown. I was certainly surprised to meet them, but honestly it didn't have near the impact on me that I thought it would because I was still on such a high after listening to this man speak all day. I couldn't stop thinking about how successful I was going to be. I was going to get to work for a successful speaker and motivator and I wanted so badly to be around him and to be mentored by him. I was so excited to be a part of this company and I loved the idea of traveling and living in some new city every two months.

We planned our first workshop as a new team right in Central Florida and we all did two weeks of intense role play and training at David's house. As a sales person and trainer, I had to be able to cold call a car dealer over the phone, secure an in-person appointment, and then sell him not only on the idea of letting me conduct his next sales meeting, but also to commit to paying a portion of the \$695 tickets for each sales person whom I could get to commit to attending the two-day workshop.

The sales teams all lived together in corporate apartments in each new city we did a workshop in. We pumped each other up and the atmosphere was always charged with greed, competition, and the love of money. This is when I really started becoming more and more indoctrinated by the motivational and success training philosophy. I filled my mind with the best programs on sales training, goals, money making, time management, and life success. Everything I listened to was about being the master of my own destiny and creating the happy dream life I really loved and wanted. I did not yet understand that the direction I was heading was in complete contradiction to the teachings of Jesus Christ, the One whom I claimed to believe in.

John 12:25 The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

I learned all the principles of being "successful" including how to justify your new greedy and money loving life, by giving back and helping others along the way, so you feel fulfilled. One of the wealthiest money loving "Christians" I know started an orphanage in Central America and did quite a bit of good after making tens of millions in network marketing. It all looked and sounded so loving and giving from the speaking platform to audiences filled with people that wanted his lifestyle. And, I'm sure it helped ease his conscience about pursuing more and more money, but when you get close to these people behind the scenes, the real treasure and master of their heart becomes crystal clear.

In my new job, I got so good at cold calling that I was getting twice as many appointments as the other guys. I had practiced drilled and rehearsed so much that no matter what the dealers said to me, I was able to keep them moving forward. I had several dealers give up on telling me no and start laughing because they were so impressed by my phone skills. With each new appointment and sale, my confidence and income was growing, and so was my hellish pride.

The same thing happened in my sales meetings at the dealerships. I eventually became so good at conducting sales meetings that my closing percentages were again breaking company records and many dealers tried to hire me on the spot. I was receiving more and more of my value by how well I could perform in sales.

The money was getting better and better, but I now noticed Jennifer was starting to feel anxious about her own career and income. She had a bachelor's degree in Organizational Psychology with honors and it was

going to waste. She had worked in retail for a few years and then believe it or not she went to work for a door to door vacuum cleaner company called Kirby in Melbourne, FL. She tried the in-home sales side of the business and made a few sales but she ended up back in the office in a more administration/sales support position.

She was always left wanting more. She craved a position in leadership and I could see she was jealous of my being on the road and being around the larger business atmosphere. We had all kinds of arguments and more than once I came home to a phonebook open to the pages of divorce attorneys. I started seeing what I called “wild business oats” that I knew she needed to sow and I saw she was fully determined to find some type of leadership position in business. She couldn’t be talked into being content, any more than I could at the time.

I don’t remember the details of how and when it actually happened, but at some point, the speaker I was working for offered Jennifer a position doing some administrative type work for him from our home. I was excited that she was now going to have a sense of fulfillment, knowing she was doing something in the business world. She became happy being a part of this guy’s company even though it was just admin and sales support type work to begin with.

I remained on the road and my sales success and income was increasing with each workshop. I think because of my insecurities as a child, I began to also love the feeling of power that this was giving me. My whole life I had felt powerless against the bullies, poverty, and my life circumstances. And now I was being able to walk into a sales meeting as a 23-year-old kid and get the old car dogs, as they call them, the guys who had been selling cars longer than I had been alive, to buy a \$695 ticket to a sales workshop. Many times, I sold tickets to the sales guys that the managers said could never be sold. The high of a nice paycheck didn’t even seem to match the feeling of having this kind of power and this sense of being valued by others.

The man we were promoting began to pay closer attention to me and spending more time with me in each city we moved to. He started honoring me on a regular basis in front of the other team members. One time he said, “*Chriswell, you have more natural talent for this than any person I’ve ever met. I am going to make you a superstar Chriswell...you are going to be a huge success and I’m going to have you conducting workshops one day on your own.*” My heart fluttered with excitement and joy!

Not too long after he said this, we were doing a workshop in Baltimore, MD, when he surprised me and came up to me on a break and told me he was going to allow me to teach a part of the class after the lunch break. Again, I was so nervous, but I got up on that stage and I was absolutely hooked. This is when I got what is known in the business as “speaker fever”. No other experience in my life could compare to the feeling I got when standing on that stage before an audience of hundreds who had paid \$695 to attend, and then whatever I told them to do, they did. It gave me a sense of power and control that had been missing in my life for so long. Perhaps just like a heroin addict after his first use, I couldn’t wait for my next hit.

However, starting from the very first seminar, I had started to see some red-flags and hear some things that made me question the high position I had been holding this guy in. He was so powerful on the stage that all of us on the sales team would sit back and watch him totally mesmerized by how he commanded the platform and audience. To this day, I have never met a more dynamic speaker or powerful personality than this man. I used to say and still believe that this guy was more passionate and more talented on the stage than even Tony Robbins. He was that good and yet he was constantly needing more adulation from us.

The guy was so impressive that I even started feeling like a junior celebrity just being around him. I was so proud of him as my boss and my insecure heart loved that others would think more highly of me because

of my association with him. That's why what happened at the end of each day's workshop was so puzzling to me.

After he dismissed the class he would always come to us feigning humility and apologizing profusely to us for not doing a very good job. Then we would all start saying, "*What in the world are you talking about...that was absolutely amazing...you killed it.*" What he was doing was so powerful that we all often joked, saying things like, "*You really put them in the ether, or you had them really drinking the Kool-Aid boss.*" Sadly, our carnally minded reference to Kool-Aid was a reference to Jim Jones. Jim Jones was best known as the cult leader of the Peoples Temple who led more than 900 followers in a mass suicide via cyanide-laced punch known as the Jonestown Massacre. My boss could make an entire room of car sales guys cry and get them to do things in public which most of them would never be caught doing sober. But our praise of him was never enough, and even as a terribly insecure 23-year-old kid, I felt something was wrong in that he had this strong need for constant feedback and praise.

There were several things like this that I had noticed from a distance, but as he started allowing me in his circle more and more, I started seeing compromises and character flaws that weren't becoming of the message he preached to audiences. He had a beautiful wife and baby daughter in his then second marriage, but I started hearing stories about him sleeping with several members of his office staff and of families that had been broken up by this man's manipulation, sexual scandals and his love for money and power.

There were rumors circulating that he was lying about most of his story and big things like having owned a dealership and sold it for millions and having played as a quarterback for LSU. I think I just kept hoping that if I looked away from what I didn't want to see, these things would all just go away, or he would change. I had so much admiration for him and the life he had built, and I felt a strong affection for him as my boss and mentor. After all, this was the man who saw something special in me and who said he was going to turn me into a superstar. If these rumors turned out to be true, my dreams and hopes of him helping me be successful would be crushed, so I just kept moving forward hoping it would all go away. Instead of going away, I was about to see something with my own eyes that shattered my image of this man and ultimately shattered my confidence in my own discernment of others.

While we were doing a workshop in Washington D.C., he took me out all by myself to a restaurant in old town Alexandria, VA called 219 Restaurant. I was so excited to get more one on one time with him. While we were sitting there, an attractive woman came and sat down all by herself about two tables down from us. Naturally, we said hello, but he used his unbelievable charisma and engaged her in further conversation and got her laughing and talking to us about who we were and what we did. She seemed fascinated by it and they exchanged cards. Eventually he and I finished our dinner, said goodbye to the lady as we walked by, and started walking back to his hotel which was just up the street.

Once we got back to his hotel, I got in my rental car and started headed back to our corporate apartment, but then I realized I forgot to get something from his hotel room and I headed back. On my way, I ran into that woman on the way to his hotel room. I said hello and realized she was looking for him. This made me really upset because he was married, and I now knew something terrible was going on. The next day at a meeting with the sales team, he started telling the story of us meeting this lady and then went on and on laughing and telling everyone, "*she came back to the hotel looking for Chriswell. Chriswell, that woman had the hots for you young man, she was after you!*" I knew in that moment he was trying cover up the fact that I saw her in the hotel on her way to his hotel room and that he was being unfaithful to his wife.

I was devastated and crushed. I had been so naïve to believe this man was a saint and that God was going to use him to help me be successful. Now I knew without any doubt that my hero was a fraud, an adulterer,

and hypocrite. All his talk about God, family, doing good to others, and living a purposeful level 10 life, now meant absolutely nothing.

At first, I was so angry and so hurt that I thought about just packing up and leaving, but then my fear of failure kicked in and so did my pride. I didn't want to admit I had been such a naive fool or have to walk away from all the hard work I put towards trying to prove I could measure up and be successful. Plus, I didn't want to walk away from the income. This is when I started consciously compromising what little spiritual light I had because of my love of money and my even greater fear of failing in something again. I was now starting to live the life of a hypocrite and was on the same despised path to hell that I knew he was on. This is where in God's mercy he reached out to afflict me in two significant ways to get me back on the path of living by the convictions I already had.

Job 33:14,16-18, 29-30 For God does speak—he may speak in their ears and terrify them with warnings, (17) to turn man from wrongdoing and keep him from pride, (18) to preserve his soul from the pit, his life from perishing by the sword. "God does all these things to a man— twice, even three times— (30) to turn back his soul from the pit, that the light of life may shine on him.

I had also gotten my best friend at the time, Brent Dickson, a job working for this guy as well. On March 1st, 1997, we were both off the road and at home with our wives for a week-long break. Jennifer and I were living in Merritt Island, FL at the time, and Brent and his wife were coming over from Orlando to go to the beach with us. I jumped on my 600cc Yamaha sport motorcycle which I hadn't ridden in weeks and went for a quick ride to our bank in Cocoa Beach. It was a gorgeous spring day and I was feeling so great. On the way home, I rode a wheelie down the 520 causeway on my way back to Merritt Island. When I set the front wheel down, I accelerated quickly to over 100 mph. Just as I let off the gas, I noticed a highway patrol car at the entrance to Kiwanis Island Park looking right at me. He immediately turned around and came after me. In a panic, I started racing to get away from him.

Unfortunately, running away was my first instinct because one year earlier I was on my way home from Orlando one night after a long day of work. I was exhausted and had a one-hour ride home on my motorcycle. It was raining and I was starting to fall asleep from the hum and vibration of the warm engine. I was desperate to get home quickly and there were almost no cars on the highway, so I decided to accelerate to over 120 mph down the 528 Beachline to shorten up the road.

Just as I was nearing Cocoa, FL, a police officer flipped on his lights on the other side of the highway. I knew he was going to have a hard time getting turned around because of the big median and it had just stopped raining, so I decided to run. On a motorcycle that will do over 150mph it was so easy to get away and I knew there was no way he was going to catch me. I got off the highway at the next exit and made it home safely. It was so easy to get away that when I saw this next set of blue lights, my instinct was to just run again.

This time, I raced ahead and tried to hide in a nearby neighborhood. I was so scared from running that my body was shaking all over and I knew I was going to wreck if I didn't get off that motorcycle. I found a street that dead ended at a canal and I pulled my bike up behind a bush, took off my helmet, and just sat down by the water. I tried to calm myself down and I started praying and asking God to please forgive me and to help me because I knew I had really messed up and done something very wrong. After about 10 minutes the fear from hiding was so bad that I could no longer just keep sitting there. The anxiety caused by my hiding started to feel worse than if I would have just got caught.

I decided to get back on my motorcycle and slowly ride out of the neighborhood. Unknown to me, he was riding around the neighborhood very slowly just listening for me to start it back up because it had a loud

exhaust pipe on it. I made it less than a half a block and here he came around the corner. He raced over in front of me, jerked me off the bike, threw my \$600 helmet on the road and put me in handcuffs. I recall being told it had become a felony to flee and evade a police officer just one month before I did this.

He was so angry that I had ran from him, and he threw in the front seat of his car with my hands cuffed behind my back. While driving down the road, he said in a loud and stern voice, *"You just made a big mistake pal...a huge one. I hope you weren't planning on doing anything good with your life because you are going to jail for a long time...your life is ruined now pal and I'm going to make sure of that. You picked the wrong guy to run from today!"* I was in disbelief that this was happening. I really felt like I had just ruined my life. I even started crying because I was so afraid.

Ironically, on the way to jail, we came up to the intersection of Courtney Blvd. and the 528 Beachline. While we were sitting at the light, I saw my friend Brent and his wife turning right in front of us smiling and laughing as they were on their way to my house and to a wonderful day at the beach. The officer's window was down so I yelled out to them, but they couldn't hear me.

I was so scared when we reached the jail and especially when they put me in that holding pen with drug dealers and thugs. One of the guys in there was looking for some paper so he could smoke some weed he had smuggled in his buttocks. I couldn't believe it. This guy had no fear or respect for the law or the jail he was in. I started thinking, *"what in the world have I gotten myself into?"*

I was even more afraid walking into the main cell area as the new guy among all those men in that jail, but then I became the best actor I had ever been. I put on a tough guy face and changed the tone of my voice to cover over how afraid I was. I even acted a little rebellious towards the unfair law even though I was 100% guilty. The first thing everyone wants to know in jail is what you're in for, so naturally I tried to make my running from the officer sound much more dramatic.

I was a skinny little 23-year-old guy and there were some big scary looking men in there. I got bunked with a smaller guy about my size who was in jail because he had beat up his girlfriend. All the jokes from high school about *"not dropping the soap"* were no longer funny and I was too terrified to go near that shower area.

When I received my first meal, that first night, it really hit me that I was in jail. There was something so humiliating about grabbing my meal on a tray through that little crack in the door, and realizing I was no longer considered a regular part of society. The normal people were outside, and I was now among convicted criminals and being fed like a dangerous animal in a cage. I sat down to eat dinner that first meal, and it was just like in the movies. This big guy sitting right across from me pointed to my role and said, *"you gonn eat dat?"* Needless to say, I had lost my appetite for my role and I gave it to him right away.

I was able to make one phone call to Jennifer and she called our boss who tried to get a bail bondsman to get me out, but no one would get out of bed at 2am for such a small amount of money. The next morning, I appeared before the judge whereupon looking at my record, he looked at me and with a huge grimace on his face, said, *"Son, what in the world are you doing in here before me today?"* I explained to him that I panicked and had made a huge mistake. He saw I had no criminal record whatsoever and let me go on pre-trial intervention. I got out of jail that afternoon and was ordered to pay a monthly fine at a meeting with a pre-trial officer once a month for 9 months. This event really shocked my system, but apparently it wasn't enough, so God was going to allow another affliction to occur right around the corner.

Not even two months later in May of 1997, the VP of the company, Tony Pate and I, were headed to do a big sales meeting at a large dealership in Baltimore, MD. He had just gotten into town and we were on the

way to the appointment in my Toyota Camry rental car. While I was driving, we got into a debate over the directions. We didn't have google maps or GPS back then, so we were looking at a little plastic map I had in the car. Somewhere just before the North 1-95 exit to the Baltimore Washington Airport, the road started turning slightly to the right and because I was looking at the map in his hands, I drifted into the left lane and in my blind spot was an 18-wheeler. What happened next was horrifying.

Our car got sucked against that big front tire and wheel well and the next thing I know, Tony and I were being pulled sideways over in front of that 18-wheeler while driving 65 miles an hour. The rental car was now completely sideways being pushed down the Interstate and my face was 6 inches from the grill of the truck. The car was shaking so violently, and I was panicked, realizing this was going to be bad.

The weight of the truck was caving in the side of the car and I had a death grip on the steering wheel and I felt like I had pushed the brake pedal through the floor. The noise was unbelievable with all the metal screeching and all four tires on the car being shredded and blown. As the car was bouncing up and down in front of the truck, we were moving forward towards the left side of the truck until finally, it kicked us free and we spun like two three 360's in the middle of 6 lanes of traffic in the center of 1-95. We spun over and slammed against the guardrail with me being trapped in. The police and ambulance were there within minutes. A female police officer reached in and gave me her bottle of Pepsi to drink until they could get us out of the car. She said, *"you better take a picture of this young man because it's a miracle you guys are alive, many times when this happens the car ends up under the trailer or under those back wheels back there."*

Tony and I were both taken to the hospital and we both suffered from muscle soreness and whiplash, but we didn't have a scratch on us. I woke up the next morning in our corporate apartment in shock and literally started yelling, *"I'm alive...I'm alive...thank you God...I got another chance."* After the gratitude of being alive passed, I went into a deep sadness, realizing that my life was looking like it was cursed. I was having troubles in my marriage, my income and career goals were just shattered after realizing my boss was a fraud, I went to jail after running from the police, and now I've just been in a terrible accident.

I remember dropping to my knees in my room and asking God for forgiveness. I told him that my life wasn't working well with me being in control, and I wanted to do life his way and with his help. It was a very humbling season and it got me back standing firm on my values and living up the light I had at the time.

David Bartels, who got me this job, had been working on a different team from mine and doing parallel workshops in other cities. He too had already seen enough monkey business and left the company and went back home to Orlando. At some point he told me about another job opportunity he had for me if I was interested but I stayed on board to finish the Baltimore workshop and then we all moved to Chicago for the next workshop.

By the time the Chicago workshop was over they had changed my pay plan a few more times, which was now ten times in less than a year. This became the straw that broke the camel's back and I told David I was interested in talking to him about the job offer because I was ready to leave.

Even after all the lies, the hypocrisy and the broken promises I had seen in the owner of the company, it was still a very sad and emotional day when I sat down and told him and Tony Pate that I was quitting. All of us had tears in our eyes and they asked if there was anything that could be done to keep me from leaving. I told them firmly the decision was already made.

Jennifer decided to stay working for the company and I reluctantly agreed to it since she was doing more office type work and because she was now the only one of us with a paying job. Things were soon going to change though and the seeds of adultery were already being planted by the predator I had once looked up to as a saint. 09/20/2017 - FINAL

Chapter 5

More Money is the answer for Everything

After making my resignation known with the sales trainer /motivational speaker, I flew home from Chicago and contacted David Bartels about the job offer he had for me, only to find out the company still wasn't ready yet. Soon, I found a job working for a company in Jacksonville, FL called Florida Trader. They were a competitor of Autotrader and I took a position with them in their new South Florida office to sign up car dealers for advertising in our publication.

One day, while visiting one of my customers who already knew I was a Christian, I found out about the Lord's gym after asking if he knew of any good gyms in the area. I was excited to hear about this Christian health club that had opened in the Fort Lauderdale area in Florida. Sadly, on my way to visit, I visualized it as a place with used and broken-down donated equipment that maybe a few brothers had all thrown together in the name of Christ.

When I walked in the door I was stunned. They had the latest equipment, everything was clean and new, there was contemporary Christian music playing, incredible murals painted on the walls, a dress code, Scripture verses on the equipment, and they donated 10% of your membership fees to help poor children.

One day while working out on a free week trial pass, I saw an employee sitting in the smoothie bar area whom I suspected was a manager or trainer. He had several tattoos, a long black mullet haircut and some pretty serious muscles. In spite of his not so "Lord's Gymish" appearance, I could see he was being very nice and personable to the people around him.

In keeping with my "motivational mike" persona, I walked right up to him, pointed at one of his arms and said, *"Ok brother, what kind of a membership do I have to purchase to get some guns like that?"* He started laughing and we made introductions. To my surprise, it was John Freehling the founder of the Lord's Gym. We ended up speaking at length and I discovered he had plans in place to expand and franchise the club nationwide. I was beyond excited about the concept and immediately I began dreaming about Jennifer and I being able to own our own franchise one day.

Jennifer had always been into fitness and even worked as a group fitness instructor at a club in Cocoa Beach, FL, while we were dating. She loved the idea of one day owning a gym, but I was never excited about the idea because I wasn't into the gym scene. However, after a few visits to this facility and talking about the possibilities, it became a dream for both of us to own and operate a Lord's Gym franchise in Orlando, FL. I saw it as a way for us to do something together and to meet the growing desire I had to do something for God.

Of course, our problem was the fact that we had no money at all to do something so expensive like this. It was going to be a long time before we could ever even come close to seeing a dream like that become a reality. This was especially true since after only a few months of working for Florida Trader in South

Florida, they started running out of money and made plans to close that office. When I found out, I contacted David again and he was now ready to offer me that job he spoke to me about earlier.

As it turned out, George Boomer and the owner of Courtesy auto group, Kim Hackett, David Bartels' boss, were starting a new company called Diamond Technology. They had developed a nifty software system to help car dealers find financing for people with less than perfect credit. David took the position of VP of sales and immediately offered me the first position they had in sales. At that time, there were only seven of us in the whole company.

He trained me on the product and then went on my first few presentations with me. When I saw the dealers response to the software, I was excited and knew this was going to be a great job for me. Once I started making a few consistent sales locally they even started flying me to appointments in other states.

Jennifer was still working from home for our old boss, the sales trainer. He had won a major contract with Mitsubishi Motors in Europe and soon, he was requesting that Jennifer fly with him and the COO to London for two weeks at a time to work on this account. I didn't like the idea at all and we argued about it quite a bit because I knew he was a wolf in a sheep's clothing, and I didn't want him around my wife knowing what he had done to so many others, but I was in a weak position.

I wasn't making much money yet in my new job and now she was being offered a promotion if she went to Europe. She was tired of working from home and wanted to be a part of something bigger and to have a role in leadership so badly. I was afraid of her becoming increasingly frustrated with me if I held her back because of how much we were already arguing in the marriage, so I held my breath and let her go.

On her first trip, I tried to put my concerns out of my mind and focus on my own work. I wasn't too worried because I truly believed Jennifer was never capable of adultery, especially because she was very much about image management. She protected her image above all else and adultery would be the destruction of her "good girl" image. Also, I really believed he respected me enough as a Christian and a former employee and friend to never approach Jennifer that way, but I still didn't like this whole idea.

As best as I can remember, I think she took two or three separate trips with him to Europe for up to two weeks at a time. My sales territory was growing, and I too was traveling almost every week. One time we didn't see each other for six weeks because of our required business travels. Our marriage was already strained and now I was being pushed into the danger zone. She started emailing me pictures of her site seeing all around London and rather than be excited for her, all I could think about was the person who I knew was taking all the pictures. It was him. This adulterous predator with tons of money was now looking like he was on a European vacation with *my* wife. He was taking her places and showing her things that I could never afford to do. I started becoming more and more worried and very jealous.

It was during this very vulnerable time that I also had my own close call with adultery. On one of my own work trips to CA, I ended up being sat next to this lady who looked exactly like Sarah Jessica Parker. At that time, I thought Sarah was one of the most beautiful women in Hollywood. This lady was her perfect twin...even the people on the plane thought it was really Sarah. She was so nice and respectful to me and over an almost five-hour plane flight, we got to know a good bit about each other. I found myself starting to have dangerous and tempting thoughts towards her. There was a war in my soul and I was justifying it all because after all, my wife was out probably eating another European dinner right then with a predator. There was a part of me that wanted her to feel the same jealousy I was feeling and here was a beautiful woman who was kind and respectful to me.

By the time the flight was over she asked me if I wanted to meet her at the best pizza place in Berkley, CA called Zachary's pizza, promising to buy if I came. I convinced myself this was ok and there was nothing wrong about it, but I was also scared to death because I feared doing wrong and I could feel the temptations coming from my own evil desires. I was telling myself I would be ok, and nothing would happen, but still inside of me there was this desire for something indeed to happen.

With knots in my stomach, I agreed to meet her for pizza, and I thank God Almighty because she turned out to just be a very nice friendly person who was not pursuing me in that way at all. I truly believe if she would have been a woman who pursued me in that way, there is no way I would have been able to resist at that very vulnerable time in my marriage. I was a carnal Christian and there was no power for truly living like Christ in my heart. In fact, based on the words of Jesus in Mat 5, I believe I was guilty of an affair because I had willful lustful thoughts towards that woman in my heart, and if God had not made a way out for me, I would have indeed fell in my body too.

Mat 5:27-28 "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' (28) But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

I remember being so thankful to God that nothing happened and that she didn't pursue me in that way. Oh, thank you Jesus Christ for your grace in my weakness! Even though in God's eyes I was guilty of an affair in my heart, and even though that qualifies me for hell, that was much easier to repent of and move on from, than if I had committed an actual affair with her. My God saved me from a much worse disaster because indeed, when I was tempted, he made a way out for me.

Jennifer and I started arguing more and more and I knew our marriage was hanging on only by a tiny thread. Finally, I told her that unless she came home from Europe and never went back, I was going to divorce her. She finally agreed and came home off the road. I didn't want her working for him anymore, or being around him at all, but she kept assuring me over and over that I didn't have anything to worry about. Again, I reluctantly let her continue working for him from home. Eventually, he opened up a facility where he was now going to conduct leadership training programs at a mountain retreat, he purchased. Soon, he was requesting that Jennifer fly out to their office headquarters more and more to help them facilitate some of these meetings. I still hated the idea of her being around him, but since they were going to be around a company of people and participants at the retreat center, I agreed to let her go. I think I was mostly motivated to let her go because of the guilt that I felt towards her being stuck working at home while I was traveling back and forth to the West coast.

They were spending more and more time together and I started getting more and more worried and upset. She assured me that God was at work in all of it. She told me that he was really starting to be honest and opened up to her about being a bad father, a bad husband, and bad Christian. This was quite shocking for me to hear.

Since the time I had left his company, she and I had both been left with a strong hope that he would get honest and repent from his hypocritical and evil life. We both, especially me, sincerely wanted to see God turn him around because there was just something so special about this man that you almost couldn't give up on. I remained in strong denial about just how evil he was, for a long time, simply because the part of him on the outside that was good, was so good. I know of one of his executives who quit because of all the hypocrisy and destruction he personally saw, and yet he went back to work for him three or more times over the years. There were several stories of people seeing the truth, leaving, and then eventually coming back. It was like watching the bondage of a wife who repeatedly goes back to her abusive husband who keeps beating her or cheating on her. There was just something about this guy that made you love him even though he was such a terrible hypocrite.

He reminds me of former President Bill Clinton in that way, where even after all the lies he told about his sexual scandal came out, many people still find it almost impossible not to love the guy. These kinds of people have an almost irresistible charisma and magnetism that deceive the weak-willed and the simple minded. Then, there are others who attach themselves to people like this, even though they see the darkness, because they are hoping to get their own carnal desires met by being around them.

As much as I had hoped he would one-day change, I knew he was not going to, and I knew he was now reeling Jennifer into his trap by telling her all these vulnerable things about his private life. He was slowly and intentionally manipulating her and telling her exactly what she wanted to hear. She had always wanted to feel needed and valuable and now she was starting to believe he wanted to change, and she couldn't even hear my repeated warnings. One day she told me, *"God is using me to really make a difference in his life and to help him, Michael."*

A small part of me still desperately wanted to believe her and to think that maybe he was finally being honest and was on the path to change. That was until the night I kept calling her hotel room until 3am in the morning with no answer. All that night, I was tormented like never thinking my worst nightmare had just come true. The torment was augmented by the fact that I was the one who had allowed her to continue to stay in this job with him. The next day I reached her by phone and she gave some very convincing explanation, but deep down I was not convinced. She assured me that nothing was going on, but I demanded that she quit the job and come home.

Proverbs 27:4 Anger is cruel and fury overwhelming, but who can stand before jealousy?

She eventually came home and found a job doing administrative work for a large law firm in downtown Orlando, FL, which gave me a big sense of relief. We weren't making much money and had nothing in savings, but I was filled with a hope for a brighter future and just glad to close the door on that man being in her life. There started to be more peace and more hope in our marriage and we again started thinking and dreaming more about the Lord's Gym idea.

I believe it was the Summer time of 1996. I was still brand new on my job and we had absolutely no income or resources to do something like this, but we had faith that God could do it if it was of Him. One day, we had both been laying by the pool listening to music in our own headphones and we popped up at nearly the same time and I said, *"Are you thinking what I'm thinking?"* She said yes.

We decided as an act of faith that we were going to drive down to South Florida and meet with John Freehling the founder and tell him of our dream to own a franchise. We barely had enough money to cover the hotel room, but we were so excited and believed we needed to do something to show God our faith. I was so happy to have something we were going to be able to dream for and one day do together as husband and wife.

We met with John and told him we had no money yet, but that we believed God was calling us to own a franchise one day, in His timing. We followed him around the gym and I wrote tons of information on a notepad about the business and what to plan for and expect. He was in agreement with our faith and handed me a piece of paper with a quote by a man named Steven Strang, a well-known Christian publisher and the founder of Charisma magazine. The quote said, *"Attempt something so great that unless God intervenes, it is bound to fail."*

My faith was so shallow and immature that the quote was like music to my itching ears, and it was to the devil's ears too. I didn't yet know the foolish difference between doing something God clearly called me to do, vs. doing something I *thought* God would approve of me doing. This was long before I knew what

dead works were or what it meant to have faith in faith, versus having faith in God and thus putting God to the test. Many Charismatics live as if God gave them faith, so that they can move Him to do what they want. That is a perversion of the truth in that God actually gave us faith, so He could move us to do what He wants.

Nevertheless, I said to John in all my foolish zeal, *“What do you recommend we do next?”* He said, *“I recommend you start driving around each chance you get to go looking for spaces for the gym, in faith. Look in the windows, visualize the space, check out the parking, etc.”* It sounded like a faith adventure that would please God to me, so we started doing that each weekend we could, and we kept the dream tucked in our hearts.

By the following year, I was consistently producing sales and we started having a substantial income. By 1998, our company was growing fast, and we now had a national sales team, but everyone knew who the top dog still was. I was not only the company's first sales person, but also the top salesperson.

As time went on, I felt like I had a serious career and not some Mickey mouse sales job. I was not only the top sales person, but I was regularly breaking my own sales records and my paychecks just kept growing. I made it my goal to earn \$10k a month so I could prove I was a good provider and so that we could have a nice life. By my second year at Diamond Technology, I was only 25 years old and regularly earning between \$7k and \$13k a month in income. We were able to buy our first home and we both drove almost new cars. At the same time, I was putting tens of thousands into a 401k plan and it was growing fast. I had come a long way from those days of not having much money to provide nice trips or things for my wife. That was quite a bit of money 20 years ago, and my pride was growing right along with my income.

In the car business, there are big auto dealers that own multiple dealerships and they are very hard to get an audience with if you are selling something. We called these guys “whales” and after years of practice and sales success, I finally had the confidence to go whale hunting. I figured out how to get an audience with these big car dealers when not many others could. Sometimes I said outrageous, but respectful and thought-provoking things that they had never heard before. Other times I took big risks to make them laugh at just the right time and in a relevant way.

One time at the annual National Automobile Dealers Association NADA, I could see a whale and his entire posse walking down the aisle towards the direction of our booth. It was Billy Fuccillo and his entire management team. Billy is worth over \$100 million dollars and owns the Fuccillo auto group in upstate New York. Here they came, walking down the aisle all dressed in black looking like an ominous scene out of the movie *The Godfather*. Ironically, car dealers hate being sold, and they were a very serious and intimidating looking group, so most of the other vendors were just letting them walk on by, but not me. Even though I was a little nervous, I now had that confidence and I was a risk taker.

Just as they came close to our booth, I jumped out in the walkway directly in front of Mr. Fuccillo, stretched out my arms and with great enthusiasm, I yelled out, *“Guess what fellas. We’re giving away free sales pitches today and all you need is a big ole checkbook to qualify.”* Billy and his managers immediately began to laugh and guess what happened next. I started walking him and his whole gang of good fellas right into our booth. A few days after the show, I was on a plane headed to his dealerships in Buffalo, NY where I sold our \$37k software to several of his stores.

One whale led to another and to another. I personally met many of the largest and wealthiest car dealers in the country including the largest, Larry Van Tuyl. Larry is a billionaire and the largest privately-owned car dealer in the world. It very rarely happens, but I got in front of Larry and his CFO to present my software to him, after I cold called his GM at his Camelback Nissan store in Phoenix, AZ. It took several months

but eventually I ended up selling him just over \$600,000 worth of my software for many his dealerships. This gave me the biggest boost in my confidence and in my pride. I had landed Larry Van Tuyl, the biggest privately-owned whale in the entire automobile industry. Larry even gave me his cell phone number to deal directly with him. Associating with a billionaire, who was now my client, was absolutely intoxicating at the time because I loved and valued money so much.

Sales wise, it was all downhill for me once I had Larry as a client. I think I must have dropped his name in almost every single presentation I ever made after that. I wanted to absolutely crush the notion that I was a loser and a failure like Jennifer had so often accused me of being. I started feeling like a king and indeed she started respecting me more and more because of the money and because my company valued me so much.

By this time, my company had given me the Western states of CA, AZ, NV, and UT as my exclusive sales territory. Often I would end up staying over the weekends and a few times we got to fly Jennifer out to go skiing with me in UT, or hiking in the mountains and AZ deserts.

My place as the top sales guy in the company was established and well-known throughout the whole company. Because we were such carnal Christians, we had started experiencing the kind of peace that the world gives, but not the kind Jesus gives. At the same time, I was becoming proud in my heart about my growing sales success and high-profile client list, but since I was a “Christian” I tried very hard to push it down and hide it from myself and others.

From the outside it appeared that the sky was the limit for me, but God was going to once again intervene to frustrate my so called “success”.

Ex 1:8 Then a new king, who did not know about Joseph, came to power in Egypt.

By my third year with the company, it had grown to over 70 employees and was growing fast. This is when they brought in a new vice president of sales name Gary Mitchell from a fortune 500 sized company who immediately wanted to throw the ropes back on me with all kinds of new policies and procedures. Instantly, I rebelled against him and started bucking the new system.

Soon, I became miserable in the job I had so much enjoyed, and my sales volume started to drop. The tension between Gary and I was so thick that everyone in the company could feel it when he and I were in the same room together. I was the top sales person and the company had depended on my sales volume for years to grow. Now, this new guy came in who cared nothing for all the hard work and millions in revenue I had generated for the company. Instead, he was bound and determined to own and control me through his system.

At one point, things got so bad, I appealed to the president of the company, Robert Steenbergh, who to this day was the best employer I’ve ever had. I went in and said, “*Bobby, if you want me to produce and to generate a lot of sales, you have to give me some relief from this guy and let me do what I know how to do.*” Unfortunately, he had to respect the direction of the company which was now being dictated by the rapid growth. He was no longer able to offer me special concessions or treat me uniquely based on my tenure and sales performance.

This was the beginning of the end for me. Soon after that meeting, I checked out mentally and set my focus on the Lord’s Gym dream which we had kept in our hearts from nearly five years earlier. It was a bit premature to move on it, but the wild horse in my heart was ready to run again at full speed. I was determined to throw off the chains that were being put on me again and to get back my freedom! The experiences that follow will become a story of extraordinary miracles followed by a colossal disaster!

Chapter 6

A Good Idea, but Not a God Idea

Before I share the Lord's Gym story, I wish to first point out that walking by true faith in God almost always requires you to move forward into risky or unknown situations that completely contradict human understanding and comfort, but *only* after you have clearly heard from God to do so. There are clear principles in Scripture which are always God's will for everyone, such as forgiveness. Forgiving someone can feel hard and risky, but you don't have to wait on the Lord to tell you to forgive someone. It is always Father's will that we should forgive the sins of others who sin against us. It may not be His will to be reconciled back to that person in a trusting relationship, but it is always His will that we forgive them from our heart.

However, regarding matters like this Lord's Gym business/ministry, I was only hearing my own imagination and my own self-will regarding what I wanted to "do for God". I was a very immature and carnal Christian. I had not heard from God to move forward on this. I was believing the delusions of my own imagination. God would have had no reason to call me into something like this while I was such an immature and shallow Christian. I didn't even have victory over the world or my own self yet. A man must be prepared and tested over and over and over before He is given a ministry, and He must be proven faithful before He is given a trust (1 Cor 4:2). I was still eight years away from the point where I would fully surrender and completely abandon my own will in submission to God's will. During those days, I wouldn't have any idea what that truly even meant and if asked, I would have said, "*Yeah, I'm surrendered to God...that's why I'm building a ministry and no longer just selling stuff.*"

Remembering that Christ taught we can know a tree by its fruit, I want to share a good many details with you about the Lord's Gym story so you can see the fruit it produced, and its final outcome as compared with RelentlessHeart.com and its fruit. The Lord's Gym, a ministry built by me, left a path of destruction, hurt lives, and people who questioned God.

On the other hand, RelentlessHeart.com, built by God, has brought many people around the world to fear and trust God with all their hearts. The testimonies of people finding life to the full in Christ through full submission to Him as their Master, have been too many to keep track of. A tree is recognized by its fruit. The Lord's gym was of me. RelentlessHeart.com is of God.

Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain. – Psalm 127:1

I was so excited about owning a Lord's gym, but I was walking by my own understanding and being driven by my own carnal desires. I concluded that if I had such a strong desire to do something like this for God, then that desire must be coming from Him. I believed I just needed to move forward in faith. Think of how foolish the story of Abraham would be if we read in Genesis chapter 12, "*And one day, Abram decided he wanted to do something for His God and so he set out in faith to find a nice land where he could settle down and have lots of godly children to bless God with.*" This sounds ridiculous doesn't it, and yet this is exactly what I and so many Christians do. We say to ourselves, sure Jesus only did what His Father told him to do, but that was Jesus, and he had a unique and special mission. However, I have some great ideas on how I can help God out and make Him famous and loved!

As you will see in the divorce and remarriage story later, by that time, I had learned how to really hear from God and to only move forward when I had heard clearly from Him. God speaks clearly to those who fear Him and who have completely submitted their lives and will to His. When we hold back, so does He.

Psa 25:12 Who, then, is the man that fears the LORD? He will instruct him in the way chosen for him.

As I mentioned in the last chapter, I had been socking away tens of thousands in a 401k through my job and although we didn't have all the resources we needed yet, I was desperately looking to move forward on the Lord's Gym idea in order to escape the oppression I felt I was under from my new boss Gary Mitchell.

I was still traveling in my job and I had become friendly with a guy named Vince, who was one of my automotive clients in Salt Lake City, UT. I would go out of my way to visit him on each of my trips out there. On one of the meetings, I opened to him and told him about my plans to leave my sales position and start a Christian health club. He expressed an enthusiastic interest in being an investor of some or all the amount we were short on, which was about \$150,000. Vince was a very nice guy and I trusted him but I was a bit concerned about a partnership because he was a Mormon and Mormons are not Christians.

I didn't have nearly the understanding of this back then, but after this encounter with a Mormon and a much worse one you will read about later, I took the time to find out who they were. Their entire religion was built on the teachings of a false prophet named Joseph Smith. Joseph Smith prophesied many things that never came true, including the end of the world, thus according to the Bible in Deuteronomy 18:22, he is a false prophet and not to be feared or respected.

To defend their faith, the Mormons quote a great deal from the Bible, but they have added volumes to it through the Book of Mormon, despite the warnings in God's word not to add to his word. They appear to believe in and follow Jesus and they speak about him much, trying so hard to convince others that they are true Christians. The reality is that they believe in a very different gospel and a very different Jesus, and even though they claim to believe in Him and to be Christians, they are not. They are no more real Christians than are counterfeit hundred-dollar bills, *real* hundred dollar bills.

2Co 11:3-4 But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. (4) For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough.

Gal 1:8-9 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! (9) As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!

I didn't understand these verses yet and even though the radar in my conscious was going off, my carnal desires to start this business were so strong that I kept moving forward despite the Biblical principle in 2 Corinthians 6 which I would surely be violating. This principle applies to all closely held or intimate relationships, not just marriage. An ongoing business partnership is an intimate relationship.

2Co 6:14-15 Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? (15) What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?

I justified moving forward suggesting to myself, "*this guy is too nice to do me any harm*" and because my need was so strong, I ignored the clear warning in the Word. These are the foolish moments when we think we are wiser than God, or that somehow *that* principle or warning in Scripture doesn't apply to *our* "unique"

situation. How many thousands have done this in their marriage? In spite of our justification, we indeed always reap what we sow.

*The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways, but the folly of fools is **deception**. – Pro 14:8*

I spent weeks dialoguing with Vince. I met with his entire family on one trip and he also flew out to Orlando to meet with Jennifer and me. We had a few conference calls with the franchisor of the Lord's Gym and Vince was ready to move forward with the investment. We signed documents and he began preparing to wire transfer the money to our account from his investment account.

I had already quit my job and cashed out my 401k and was prepared to max out our credit cards to get the business started. Jennifer also quit her new job as a financial advisor and we put all our efforts into moving forward with the gym. We signed a lease agreement in a huge outdoor shopping center in Southeast Orlando, for \$16,000/mo. rent on a 10,000-square foot space. We even started signing equipment leases on about \$150,000 in gym equipment. Vince also co-signed with us on the equipment leases, but we still hadn't received the wire transfer from him. He kept assuring us it was coming, and it was just being delayed a bit by his brokers slower than expected transaction process.

By this time, they had put coming soon signs up on the space and we opened a pre-sale office to start selling memberships. The time came for me to pay our franchise fee and to take my franchise training down in South Florida. We went fully assured by Vince that the money was on its way. We were expecting the wire transfer any day, so I went ahead and wrote the check for \$37,000 to the franchisor and he agreed to hold it for a few days until the wire came in to our account.

Just after we arrived at our franchise training, we were in John Freehling's office while he took a call from a member. He was shockingly rude to the member regarding his contract with the gym and seemed to be so greedy regarding money. It was very unbecoming of a Christ follower and I was really upset by it. We had the check in our hands but hadn't given it to him yet and I remember thinking, "*Oh my goodness, have we made a huge mistake partnering with this guy...this is the founder of the whole Lord's Gym and he is not at all what he represents this place to be on the outside.*"

A prudent man sees danger and takes refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it. – Pro 22:3

Luk 6:43-45 "No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. (44) Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. (45) The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.

All those years ago, I was far too spiritually blind to see how ungodly of an idea the Lord's Gym was to begin with. I remember thinking, "*The Lord's name is on this, so it can never fail.*" My deeply rooted and hidden love of money was blinding me from seeing the whole truth and being able to discern good from evil. The truth is that the Lord's Gym was just another way to create a competitive edge and sell gym memberships in an already over saturated gym market. And, to justify the thing as being godly, they hijacked the true meaning of 1 Cor 6:19-20 as their theme verse.

"Do you not know your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body." I am so ashamed that I bought into this twisted perversion of God's word all to justify a clever business model in the name of God. This verse is shared in the context of sexual immorality and means to honor God with a spiritually pure body, free from sin and anything that contaminates it. It does not mean to build up your

physique, take all kinds of nutritional supplements, and take before and after photos of your flesh for vain purposes, and then justify it all by saying you are just stewarding the body God gave you.

There was no such thing as a health club until Jack Lalanne created the first American fitness club in Santa Monica, California in 1947. That means for nearly 1,900 years Christians have had no problem obeying this verse *without* a health club. That is because they knew the real meaning of the passage.

I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. – 1 Cor 15:50

Looking back, I can say with certainty that if Jesus ever would have walked into a Lord's Gym, it would have been only to flip over the dumbbell racks and drive out all of us gym rats! Oh, how I thank the Father, for saving me out of my ignorance and for being so merciful and patient with me through this terribly carnal and ignorant season of my Christianity. I did not yet have eyes to see and I thank Him for not giving me what my foolishness fully deserved.

Then he comes to men and says, "I sinned, and perverted what was right, but I did not get what I deserved." – Job 33:27

He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. – Psalm 103:10

The Lord had been warning me by what I saw in the franchisor's office, but I wasn't spiritually strong enough in Christ yet to do the right thing. I was still a very carnal Christian even though I didn't realize it. I wanted so badly to succeed, and I had such a huge fear of failing in front of others, especially after I took the huge risk to leave my last employer and start this business. If I left now, I feared I would look like a fool, not to mention all the time and money we would have wasted. Because I was a carnal Christian and not a spiritual Christian, I did not understand the importance of discerning a tree by its fruit and having the wisdom and restraint to act accordingly.

John deposited the check for the \$37k a few days after we got back, but we still hadn't received the "any minute now" deposit into our account from Vince. Indeed, the check bounced, and I got a call from the Vice President of the downtown Orlando branch Bank of America, who wanted me to come in and visit before they got the police involved. I didn't realize it but I could have gone to jail for this. I was humiliated and scared to death. I assured her that we were expecting a wire transfer any moment now that would take care of the balance and that the franchisor accidentally deposited the check prematurely. The bank agreed to give me a few days to get a positive balance back in my account.

Day after day came one good excuse after another from Vince as to why the money still wasn't wired to us. I wanted so badly to believe he was going to come through for us. I just couldn't believe we would get this far down the road and have this thing flop. Finally, I realized we were being lied to and that there must have been a problem on his end that he wasn't telling us about. To find out the truth of what was going on, John, called him and asked him for his home address so we could ship all this gym equipment to him which he had co-signed with Jennifer and I on. Mind you, this was enough gym equipment to fill an entire 4,000 square foot area. You can imagine the shock of this phone call to Vince.

By the way, this kind of tactic John was using is not the behavior of a true follower of Christ. A true follower of Christ does not manipulate people or circumstances or trust in man to get what they want, even when they are the one being wronged. Instead they are willingly wronged or cheated (Luke 6:30-32, 1 Cor 6:7) and they trust in the Sovereign control of God over all people and circumstances.

2Ch 25:8 for God has the power to help or to overthrow."

Job 12:16 To him belong strength and victory; both deceived and deceiver are his.

Job 42:2 I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted.

Psalm 75:7 But it is God who judges: He brings one down, he exalts another.

Psa 135:6 The Lord does whatever pleases Him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths.

Pro 16:4 The LORD works out everything for his own ends— even the wicked for a day of disaster.

The next day, I received an overnight letter from his attorney with a cease and desist notice, stating that he was no longer interested in the investment for personal reasons. I was in shock. Paul, our leasing agent for the space said we were now “an underfunded tenant” and they would have to take the coming soon signs off the store if we didn’t come up with at least \$100k in our bank account within seven days.

I had spent five years dreaming of this opportunity and saving our money for it. I had nowhere else to turn to come up with that much money, especially in seven days. I was sick to my stomach and paralyzed by fear. I was asking God for help and didn’t know what to do. Two days later, a friend of mine showed up at my house and I said, “*I didn’t know if I am supposed to be just waiting for God to deliver me with a miracle, or if I should be out knocking on every single door I can asking for money*”. Instead of just sitting at home, I invited my friend to go out with me on the boat to go wake boarding, just so I could go get my mind off it all. Also, just like riding my dirt bike, you can’t wake board and think about problems at the same time.

Just as my friend and I were putting my boat in the water, like a taunt from the devil, my cell phone rang. It was Paul, my leasing agent calling me to remind me I now only had five days left to come up with the money or the coming soon signs were coming down and they were taking back the space. If this happened, we would lose everything including our reputation. We had already spent all our savings and 401k’s on moving this business forward, and now we were five days away from possibly losing it all. I was terribly stressed out.

My friend and I were wake boarding in a remote lake at Moss park in Central FL, where naturally there are alligators. It was such an eerie overcast and ugly day on the lake and we were the only one’s out. I was under so much stress that even when I would fall while wakeboarding and had to wait for him to come back around and pick me up, I remember sitting in that dark water thinking about how easy it would be to just succumb to an alligator attack if it happened. That way I could know that the war was finally over. To die a gruesome death and end up in the belly of an alligator would have in some way been a relief in my mind.

We finished wake boarding and headed home. As I was backing the boat into my garage, I saw one of my neighbors walking his dog, who I had made small talk with a few times and liked. His name was Steve. His wife still worked, but he was retired, and he played golf every day. Steve knew I was opening a gym and when he walked past my driveway, he asked how things were going. I remember feeling like I was in a fog. I didn’t want to talk to anyone, but I replied, “*Well, it’s like a roller coaster ride Steve...we’ve had good news and then some really bad news.*”

He asked me what the bad news was and I told him. We spent about an hour talking in my house and the next day, to my amazement, he gave me a check for \$20k with the understanding that I would pay him back with a reasonable amount of interest. He said, “*if you do well with this amount, I’ll consider making more available to you.*” This was nothing short of a miracle, but it was still \$80k short of what I needed.

Incredibly, over the next three days, from three separate people, who knew what was going on, I received another \$50k without even asking for it. Finally, the seven-day deadline came and I had to tell the leasing

agent that I saw several miracles and came up with \$70k in just a few days, but that I fell short of the \$100k. He said, *“that’s close enough for me, but we will need you to personally guarantee the lease now since you didn’t come up with the full amount.”* At that point, I was so relieved and so thankful to be able to keep moving forward that I was willing to take the risk of personally guaranteeing the lease. I felt for sure these doors had been opened by God and that He was with me.

This was another deception I couldn’t see and a foolish decision I made. Whenever I look back on this story, I think about how different things might have been if only I had some wise godly person to tell me, *“Michael, you are making a foolish decision and violating clear principles in Scripture that are designed to protect you. If you can’t secure the lease without personally guaranteeing it and thus violating a Biblical principle, perhaps you should not move forward and wait for God to act in your behalf, or not at all.”*

Pro 22:26-27 Do not be a man who strikes hands in pledge or puts up security for debts; (27) if you lack the means to pay, your very bed will be snatched from under you.

The truth is, I’m not sure if I would have had “ears to hear” because my desire was still so strong, the fear of failure so great, and the strength of my own carnal self-will so dominant. Not to mention that Father had a great deal He was going to teach my ignorant self through the experience of much pain and suffering.

While the lease was being drawn up by the landlord, Paul, the leasing agent made it very clear that they like things done in a certain way. I hired an Architect on March 7th, 2001 and for \$12,500 we had a set of blue prints two weeks later. We signed a five-year lease agreement with the landlord for 10,000 square feet of space in the Waterford Lakes Town Center on March 14th, 2001.

At the same time, we were using a set of schematic drawings to secure bids from a few other builders. The first bid we received was from a builder who had built the Family Christian bookstore location just next door to where the gym was going to be. His bid came back at \$250k, which was out of our budget, so we kept shopping. Paul had mentioned a few of the builders that had done work in the shopping center, but he kept putting tremendous emphasis on one particular builder, asserting that if we wanted the job done well and on time, we should surely go with him. After the high bid from the first builder, my Architect gave me the name of someone he recommended. When I disclosed this to Paul, he again began putting a great deal of pressure on me to go with the builder he was recommending. He kept pushing for us to use them as if they were his best friends, or almost like he worked for them.

Each time we met with another builder or received a recommendation for one, he would explain why it was a mistake and again would insist that if we wanted the store done right and on time, we needed to go with this one builder he was recommending. He told me a story about Pier 1 Imports, saying they had opted for another builder who was \$7,000 less than the one he was recommending, and they ended up not being able to open until after the Christmas season. This builder he was pushing us to use had already built out about 500,000 square feet of white box space in this shopping center, so I agreed to meet with them.

I sat down with them on April 2nd, 2001, now with a full set of construction plans for him to give me a bid from. After he reviewed the plans, he consulted his books to see what other similar size jobs in the same center had cost him to build. We were given a hand-written estimate of \$207,500 to build out the gym. He estimated the white box construction at \$141,000 and said it would be another \$66,500 for tenant improvements. We were going to be purchasing some of the materials and doing some of the painting ourselves, so that took off another \$12,200. Our final bid price from him was now only \$195,300 for the entire project. He estimated the building would be finished and delivered to us by July 15th, 2001.

The landlord was giving us \$100k toward the build out since we were taking delivery of a raw shell, rather than a white box space which is what they typically provide. The \$100k would only be paid to the contractor upon my approval and upon him showing all liens had been paid to his subcontractors.

I was pleased that the price nearly met with our budget of \$200k. I explained to him that if we hired him our payments on the project needed to be back end loaded towards the end of the job since we would be light on cash flow and would be paying for a large portion of the construction from the pre-sale of memberships. He assured us that wouldn't be a problem, even saying they had a space they were working on now that was 75% finished and they hadn't asked for a penny yet.

We both agreed to move forward on a handshake. He told us he could get started right away without a permit and get about 4 weeks' worth of work done, and then there would be another eight weeks' worth of work after the permit was pulled. He was going to have an official contract drawn up to finalize our agreement shortly, but they would go ahead and begin work to prevent any further delay of the gym opening.

They began work after only two days. We had several meetings with my architect and even with the chief plan reviewer, Alan Plant of Orange County, while they did the work. About three weeks into the project I asked Karen, their construction coordinator why after three weeks' worth of work do we still not have a contract yet. She said, "*Don't worry, we'll get one taken care of soon.*"

I remember being just beside myself with excitement that all of this was really happening after such a long wait. I couldn't take my eyes off the construction site once they got started. I walked all through it almost every single day to see the progress. It felt surreal.

We had already leased a smaller temporary space in the center from which we could begin pre-selling memberships before the gym would open. There was quite a bit of interest in the gym, not only because it was a "Christian" health club but also because it was the first club in the area. We started selling quite a few memberships right away.

On May 23rd, 2001, after about five weeks of construction work had been done, the contractor called me for a meeting at the construction site. He pulled up out front with us and I could tell he was in a very bad mood. We went inside and sat down at a dust covered fold up table with my blue prints laid out on top of it. I will remember for the rest of my life, the words which came out of his mouth next. He glanced in my direction and then immediately looked at the ground and said, "*Mike, I don't know whether to give you a tranquilizer shot before I tell you this or not.*" The second he said those words, my body had a physiological reaction that knew disaster was coming...I could literally feel fear and the cortisol and adrenaline shooting through my body. He began telling me that the actual jobs from all the sub-contractors were coming back at much higher prices than he had anticipated and then he immediately began blaming my architect for the increases.

The new price he was now telling me was going to be \$294,000, up \$98,700 from the original bid of \$195,300 and I had already collected tens of thousands in pre-sold membership fees and had given the members a date the gym would be open by. After I nearly fell out of my chair and told them that I couldn't afford that much, they assured me that there were several things they could eliminate in order to bring the cost down and that they would work on it for the next week.

On June 12th, 2001, Karen showed up at our pre-sale office. Jennifer was almost six months pregnant with our first child Tyler and it was just she and I working that day. There was about a dozen people in there at one time and we were very busy. I asked her if she could come back, but she was insistent that they needed a signed contract that day. I sat down and quickly started skimming through it. I noticed that the revised

contract price was now \$288,000. Since this was only \$6,000 less than the \$294k, I asked Karen what happened to them finding ways to substantially cut down the price. She assured me that they were still working on it but that for formality purposes they couldn't do anymore work without a contract in place.

She insisted I sign it, so the work could continue and stated that the owner and I could talk and amend the agreement later. Under the stress of a very busy moment, watching Jennifer struggling to help all the people by herself, and the fear of having anything further delay the opening date of the gym, I reluctantly held my breath and signed it.

What a foolish decision this was on my part. I held all the leverage up until that moment. They had done all of this work and yet they had no agreement from me stating I had either ordered it, or that I would ever pay for it. Nevertheless, Father was pleased to allow me to make such unwise choices, further entangling myself, because He wanted me to see just how powerless I was to build a spiritual life and ministry apart from him, even when He supplied me the resources to do it.

Father was not working towards my simply being able to live by the principles of wisdom. He was instead working so I would be able to one day know Him, submit to Him and walk with Him by faith in total dependence on His grace and Spirit. To obey even godly or religious principles apart from personal submission to the Father of our spirits, and apart from living in relationship with Him by faith, is completely useless. My efforts were still directed towards doing something *for* Christ rather than to simply love Him and abide in Him, allowing Him to do the work.

Father was going to teach me this by breaking up, in its entirety, all of the false ground I was standing on apart from Him. There was planned for me a breaking and a stripping, in progressive levels of increasing affliction, just as Father saw was needed for the work in my heart. I was going to learn through painful experience the meaning of Christ's words in John 15, "*apart from me you can do nothing.*"

On June 18th, with only about 35% of the construction done, the contractor sent me his first draw request for \$100k. I called him and reminded him that this was not the deal that we had discussed. He reminded me of what it *now* said in the contract and he did so in a very intimidating way but ended up saying he would give me some more time. Not a full three days later, he had his office call me to see if I had the money yet. When I said no, he demanded that I come to his office for a meeting to explain. When I asked his brother, his partner, why he had now changed his tune on this payment schedule, he said it was because the job turned out to be so expensive.

Upon visiting with the main brother (the rude one) at his office, he demanded I sign a payment schedule of \$50k a week until the job was paid off. The following week on the Monday of my first payment due of \$50k he pulled his whole crew off the site and shut the job down. He called me up and cussed me out for thirty minutes, saying that I had missed the payment since it was after 2:00pm and he was not going to do any more work until he got some money. The note did not specify any time that the money had to be given to him by each week. He started screaming at me and said I was disrespecting him, and that no other builder would carry me this far without any money. This was coming from the same man who weeks earlier boasted they were 75% finished on another job and hadn't yet asked for a penny.

I asked him how he could justify expecting me to just come up with an extra \$98k that he had added to the job. He said that it wasn't his fault and blamed it all on my architect. He told me I had better come up with some money fast or come down to his office and sign over 50% of my company to him. This was the rudest professional conversation I had ever had in my life. I felt like this guy was becoming a monster.

I made a \$50k payment that same day to his brother on the job site, and then missed the next two weeks. Because of the pressure they were putting on me, I started talking to banks about getting a loan. I got shut down by every bank because they felt I must have had bad planning since the job went so far over budget. They couldn't believe how this could happen. Even though the contractor was doing all of this, it was 100% my fault that I allowed myself to get in this situation. Banks are shrewd. Indeed, they were able to see the fool sitting in front of them that I could not yet see (me), and it is not wise to make a loan to a fool.

On July 5th, we had a construction meeting at the site, where they informed me that construction was now behind schedule because I had hired an incompetent architect, who had in turn hired an incompetent mechanical engineer, who in turn hired an incompetent electrical engineer. There were arguments about misplaced HVAC return air vents and accusations that the electrical engineer had badly miscalculated our power requirements and now there was not going to be enough power in the gym.

In this same meeting, the owner asked us where the rest of the money from the job is going to come from. He then assured me that there would be no more than \$3500 in change orders, that would be added to the \$288k contract and I wrote them down. He said this like he was doing me a favor, in spite of still having done nothing to try to cut costs off the \$288k, which they originally promised me they would do.

We had already pre-sold tens of thousands of dollars in membership fees and our members were expecting the gym to open on July 15th, 2001. I walked around the construction site just dazed and confused, not knowing what to do, but not feeling that I had any other choice. I was so naïve in this whole thing. I didn't yet realize how badly I was being taken advantage of. Instead I concluded these were just the unfortunate things that can happen in construction, but that I could trust God to help me with them.

It was becoming more important for me to get that gym open than it was to fight over the price anymore. I explained to the contractor I was having trouble securing finances because the job had gone so far over the budget and original bid, but I said, *"God is just going to have to provide...He has done it before and He will do it again."*

Now I was violating another and even more important Biblical principle. *"Do not put the Lord your God to the test."* – Mat 4:7 God hadn't created this mess; I had.

They burned up another 3.5 weeks blaming my architect for this mishap and the job sat motionless. Finally, at the request of the architect and contractor, the mechanical engineer fired the electrical engineer and hired another one. When the new engineer got on the job, he said, *"I don't know what you guys are talking about, this configuration is fine and there will be plenty of power."* He was right. The electrical system was never changed after that and it always worked just fine.

They pushed the completion date back several more times until it was now estimated for August 1st, 2001. Finally the gym was getting closer to being finished and the contractor started asking the leasing agent to accelerate the \$100k white box allowance to them, stating they were using up all of their credit lines on my job because it became so big. I ended up feeling bad for him and told the builder I was sorry that my job was causing this, but I said, *"If you would have told me in the beginning that this job was going to cost this much, I would have never moved forward with you."*

The landlord agreed to accelerate the payment to the contractor, but they needed my signature. I felt I had no choice and I genuinely wanted to pay the contractor for his work, just not to overpay for it. On July 30th, we all met and I signed over the check to them for the \$100k.

Knowing I was having trouble securing a loan for the remaining amount of construction overages, and seeing how well the pre-sale memberships were going, Steve, my neighbor was inclined to help us again.

After seeing how quickly I paid him back his \$20k with interest, he had already loaned me another \$50k which I was making payments to him on. Then on August 17th, 2001, he helped us secure a bank loan of \$120,000 by collateralizing a loan for us with a CD in the same amount. I did not ask him to do this; he simply offered to do it and I desperately but foolishly accepted.

This time, Steve and I both violated that same wise Biblical principle. *Pro 22:26-27 Do not be a man who strikes hands in pledge or puts up security for debts; (27) if you lack the means to pay, your very bed will be snatched from under you.*

After the fact, I saw another biblical principle I was violating because Steve was not a believer in Christ. Although God used King Cyrus, a pagan, in the Old Covenant, to build the temple, in the New Covenant we see that those who were called to minister and do God's work, did not knowingly accept financial support from unbelievers.

*For they went out for the sake of the Name, **accepting nothing from the Gentiles.** Therefore we ought to support such men, so that we may be fellow workers with the truth. – 3 John 1:7 NASB*

On the same day we secured the loan, the contractor made his second and final draw request. I gave them a check for \$110k making the total paid to the contractor \$260k. This was still \$28k short of the contract price of \$288, but it was \$65k more than his original bid to us, upon which we had made our buying decision.

We were now broke, with no cash reserves, no more operating capital, and no money to finish the club or pay back several personal debts to people that had lent us money.

As if things weren't bad enough already, included in their final draw request was a list of over \$33k in change orders that I was promised would be no more than \$3,500. This was the straw which broke the camel's back. The new cost was now \$321k, up from the original bid of \$195k.

It was at this point that I realized I had been had. I was being strung along and taken advantage of left and right. These guys were taking this young passionate 27-year-old kid for all that they could get away with and I finally was able to see it. I think they got greedy and tried to go too far. I contacted Paul, the leasing agent, and told him I was now going to hire an attorney and sue them because I knew I had been defrauded.

He practically yelled at me and spent the entire time telling me what a huge mistake this would be and how disappointed in me he was. He said, *"If you call an attorney you might as well hand me back the keys to the building and walk away, you will lose all 600 of your members, it will get tied up in court, you will never get the gym open and you will be in default on your lease to us."* He said, *"Mike, it's only another \$61k you own him, just pay it and move on, you can worry about making it back when the gym opens, but for right now you need to do whatever it takes to get that gym open and your rent is going to start on August 15th, 2001.*

Under a great deal of stress and pressure, I became fearful that what Paul said might happen and instead I decided to just do whatever I could to get that gym open.

On August 19th, I had a conversation with the nicer brother about what we needed to do to get the gym open. I explained that we had pre-sold over 600 memberships and now members were starting to cancel left and right because the gym was now over one month past the expected date of opening. I told him that we had done everything we could, and we had no more money to give them.

That's when he said they were going to have to withhold our Certificate of Occupancy until they got paid. I didn't realize it until it was too late, but they had applied for the building permit in such a way that only

they could apply for our C.O. not us. I walked away, not knowing what was going to happen. Two days later, this same brother called me, because the mean brother and I were barely on speaking terms at this point. He told me that they talked about it and found a way to help me get the gym opened. They agreed to give us our C.O. if we signed a promissory note for the other \$61k payable over six months. Again, they felt they were really doing me a big favor by doing this. I was trapped. I felt my only choice was to sign the promissory note or lose everything.

I spoke with a few friends and business associates who insisted that I could move forward and then seek legal retribution after we got the store open and up on our feet. Jennifer and I went downtown that day to their attorney's office and signed the note. We received our C.O. from the contractor the next day. We were now only one day away from opening our club and seeing our five year dream become a reality.

Chapter 7

The Dream Becomes a Nightmare

In spite of being badly taken advantage of by our contractor, Jennifer and I finally got the doors open to our Orlando, FL franchise of the Lord's Gym health club, in the Waterford Lakes Town Center on August 22nd, 2001. However, because the builder had cheated us so badly, such that we had to give him all our remaining capital in order for him to let us open, we opened without most of our equipment being in place. We didn't have any of the plate weights for the free weight area, no lockers in the bathrooms, no T.V.s, no stereo system, no smoothie bar, no group fitness equipment, no window tint on a space that had 40% external walls with windows, no exercise mats, no aerobics flooring, and no pro-shop or retail products.

Several members had canceled their memberships due to the delayed opening, but to me it was a miracle that all of them didn't cancel. I couldn't start billing them for an entire month, so we had no money to finish anything. It was terribly embarrassing and terribly stressful, but most of our members were so very gracious with us, especially since nearly 600 of them had met Jennifer and I personally and knew we were just two young people doing this as a family business.

I met with an attorney who assured us we had been badly taken advantage of by this contractor and he recommended we not make the first payment on the \$61k promissory note to the contractor. I informed the builder and he filed a lawsuit against us immediately. My attorneys told us we had a slam dunk case against the contractor and suggested that we get the district attorney involved.

We filed a lawsuit, attaching the landlord to the suit, alleging collusion between Paul, the leasing agent and the contractor, who we asserted were part of a conspiracy to defraud us. We stated that this alleged collusion between them was preventing us from performing under the contract with the landlord.

Then, just twenty days after we have opened the already crippled club, we turn on our T.V.'s the morning of September 11th, 2001, to see what looks like a world falling apart. Needless to say, our community and the world had much bigger problems to be worried about for the next several weeks, than joining a gym. The gym itself looked like a ghost town for several days until some members began showing up to work out just for stress relief.

Then, just two weeks after September 11th, our first child, Tyler was born. Now we were brand new business owners and brand-new parents all at the same time. Those are two of the most stressful things you can go through in life and we were doing them both at the same time.

I was so proud and amazed to be a father. I loved having Tyler in the gym with us and he was such a wonderful distraction for me away from the crisis I was in, in the business. He slept in Jennifer's office in a crib, and when I could, I was carrying that boy all over the gym showing him off to everyone.

Tyler represented my greatest pride so far, and he was also going to become the source of my greatest fear. To this day, I have never felt as much fear as the day I accidentally left him in my truck. Your whole life it has been just you, and then one day you come home from the hospital and you have a new person who is now totally dependent on you. They weren't there yesterday, but today they are. You haven't been used to taking someone with you everywhere you go.

With my mind clearly on all the stress at the gym, one day I put Tyler in his car seat in the back of my Toyota 4Runner and took him with me to go to our house to get something to eat. By the time, I got to our house, he was asleep and I had completely forgotten he was in the vehicle. I don't remember what month this was...but in Florida it was still warm enough that twenty minutes later when I left the house and opened my truck, I saw him in the backseat and he was still asleep, but he was now sweaty. I absolutely panicked...screaming out loud, *"Oh my God help me...how could I do this...God please help me...please don't let him die...please help us Lord!"* The adrenaline was coursing through my veins and I was just begging God to help me as I raced back to the gym and pulled up to the back entrance. I ran straight into Jennifer's office and exclaimed, *"Stop what you are doing and breastfeed this baby right now!"* To the praise of God, he ended up being completely fine! God was watching over him, when I was not.

This wasn't the first time I saw Tyler recover from something terrible. When his mother was about 7 months pregnant with Tyler, we were working in the pre-sale office and a young man was practicing his roundhouse karate kicks while his parents signed up for a membership. Jennifer was walking through the room and during one of his kicks, he spun around and kicked her right in the center of the belly with a full force blow to baby Tyler. She started screaming and was in so much pain as contractions began. We took her to the hospital and everything ended up being just fine with her and Tyler.

There are no words to describe how rotten of a human being I felt like when I left my own baby son in the car. This happens, especially in Florida, so many times and the child dies. I might have been only a few more minutes away from being someone who did that. God have mercy on those poor people who have accidentally done this. My God what a horrifying experience. I can say no more, except that we serve a Roman 8:28 God. That experience bonded me to Tyler in a big way and kept me from getting lost as his father, in the midst of all the business chaos. I began watching over him like a hawk.

What at first seemed to be the terrible timing of a business and birth combination actually turned out to be a real blessing. No matter how bad things were going to get in the business, there was always the greater need and focus of taking care of a baby. I recognize how much of God's grace to me during the most difficult season of my life came through Tyler.

Now, back to the gym story. Not only did we still not have the reserve money to finish the improvements to the club, but now we also couldn't pay our \$16,000/mo. rent, while trying to pay the legal fees to defend ourselves against the contractor. As the leasing agent began demanding rent money, I told them I would pay them their rent money when they helped me get my \$121,000 dollars back which was stolen from me by the contractor, they heavily influenced me to use. For a while, the leasing agent was able to stall any corporate action against us, but on January 9th, 2002, they filed a legal complaint against us and made demand for the rent monies owed.

In response to the complaint, our attorney advised us to file a counterclaim against the Landlord in addition to naming them in the lawsuit we had against the contractor. The whole thing got so complicated that even the court was getting confused because of the closeness and similarities in this triangle of lawsuits.

On November 15th, 2001, the contractor who I purchased our building sign from walked in and asked me if I had heard about the trouble another tenant (The Birkenstock Shoe Store) was having with my builder. I met with the owner and it turned out she was going through the same thing. Paul, our same leasing agent, had gone out of his way to get her to do business with this same contractor and they had done the exact same thing to her. She hired them on a lower estimate and then they came to her halfway through the construction and told her it was going to be much more than they anticipated.

Naturally, I kept most of what was going on to myself. I didn't want any of the members to panic and I truly believed God was going to deliver us out of this whole confusing mess, no matter how bad it was looking. I kept most of my focus on running the business and trying to grow it and survive. There was one person however who knew all that I was going through.

Throughout the whole construction and opening process, I had been mentored and encouraged by a fellow franchisee, who became a dear sister to me. Her name was Marji Barboza. Marji and her husband owned the Lord's Gym franchise in Ocala, FL and they had opened their club one year before we opened ours in Orlando.

As things were getting more and more difficult for me in the legal battles, I would call Marji or go visit her to get some advice and encouragement. During one visit, I just kept telling her how stressed out I was and how bleak the situation looked. I leaned over, pointed to the top of my head and said, "*Look at this Marji, I'm so stressed out that I'm even losing my hair over this.*" She smiled in a smirky and confident kind of way and then she got up and walked over to shut her office door. I had no idea why she was closing the door or what she was about to tell me.

She shut her office door and with that same smirk on her face, almost looking cocky now, she walked back over to her desk and sat down. She said, "*Would you like to compare hair loss my little brother?*" I said, "*What are you talking about girl, you have tons of hair.*" I said, "*Your skin is awfully orange from drinking all that carrot juice, but your hair looks just the same to me.*" Without saying another word, she flung her head forward and removed the hair from her head. I was completely shocked. She had been wearing a wig and underneath of the wig was a matted down mess of what little hair she had left. She said, "*This is what chemotherapy does to you; the breast cancer has traveled to my lymph nodes. I'm still believing God is going to heal me, but I'm also doing everything I can on my part!*"

There was a mixture of tears and laughter as we began to realize we were spiritual "blood" brother and sister. We were both fighting the biggest *out of our control* battles of our lives, and we were both calling upon the name of the Lord, in faith, to help us. We both knew and believed that God was not going to leave us or forsake us, and that He would restore and deliver us both for His glory. Although it was hard, we both kept clinging to Him believing these to be just a test of our faith.

As our respective battles continued to get worse, we encouraged each other and prayed with all our might. Marji was a woman of strong faith in God and belonged to a Word of Faith church. For her, there was no other possible outcome except for victory in Christ for both of us. Several times I heard Marji say to me with great conviction, "*Michael, God is not going to bring us this far to just drop us like hot potatoes...the devil is just trying to rob God of His glory and we are not going to allow Him to do that!*"

Things were already tough for me battling this contractor and then alleging collusion on the part of the shopping center leasing agent, but things were about to get even more complicated! This is around the time

when I had that bizarre experience at church, with the lady who said to me, *“The Lord will be magnified and glorified through your obedience”*, and then she just disappeared. That experience was quite bizarre, but I remember it left me feeling very encouraged thinking that perhaps God was going to use my life to bring glory to His name. Perhaps God was going to save me out of this mess after all.

Then came that Wednesday night in March of 2002. I was still in the club working in my office, when Paul Norris, the president of L.A. Fitness walked into our club and asked to speak to me. A very tall and shrewd looking man, he sized me and my club up shockingly fast. He was able to tell me within minutes about how much I was billing each month in membership fees and how much profits I was earning from other services in the club. I knew he was not there to flatter me. He had come to inform me that L.A. Fitness had been in contract negotiations with the landlord for the past 18 months regarding purchasing a piece of property, in the same shopping center, right across the parking lot from us, and that they were planning on building a 50,000 sq. health club. I was stunned by this news.

I spoke with my attorney about this and discovered that the Landlord’s talks and negotiations with L.A. Fitness would put the landlord in direct violation of the implied covenant of good faith, fair dealing and commercial reasonableness, which is in every Florida business contract. If my landlord allowed them to build another health club in the same shopping center, it would be a death blow to our business, preventing us from being able to perform our obligations under our lease agreement with the landlord.

When questioned through my attorney, the landlord denied ever being in negotiations with L.A. Fitness. Nevertheless, Paul Norris told me they wanted my space to use as a pre-sale location and as a temporary gym for their members while they built their giant club. He straightaway offered me \$300,000 to buy us out, saying I could move to another location and start over. I was shocked at first that this was happening, but soon I became a bit excited thinking maybe this might be an opportunity from the Lord for getting us out of the mess we were in with the builder and the shopping center.

No, God was not going to just wipe all this mess away and make things comfortable again. It reminds me of Joseph making friends with the Pharaoh’s cup bearer and baker by interpreting their dreams and then asking them to make sure they put in a good word for him with the Pharaoh, so he could get out of prison. I’m confident that there was no way God was going to allow that to happen because Joseph might have very well thought it was because of something he had done to save himself. No, God was going to give him two more years in that jail and when he did come out it was going to be a spectacular salvation of God.

Father knew that there was still too much in my heart that was not like Christ and too much in His way. No, God was not going to bring an easy escape that I might somehow think I had a role in. No, He was going to bring more pain and more discipline by an even hotter fire.

Mark 9:49 Everyone will be salted with fire

There was a pride deep in my heart that I was hiding from everyone I could, including myself. Father helped me to see how disgusting it was by revealing it to me. The gym was loved and appreciated and honored by many in the community. One day I walked into Panera bread to get some lunch and one of our members was there eating with some others when I walked in. He yelled out, *“Mike...sir...hello!”* I walked over and he jumped up and told everyone at the table that I was the owner of the Lord’s Gym around the corner and he gave me much honor. Immediately, I feigned humility by saying something like, *“Oh, my friend...please stop...I’m just doing the work God asked me to do...there’s no need to call me the owner of the gym.”*

What a hypocrite! I was lying! Deep inside of me, my evil self-nature was actually saying, *“no, please do introduce me as the owner of the Lord’s gym...I love hearing that...it feels so good to be honored before*

men that way.” This is the truth which I could never hide from Father. Even though I pretended to be humble and I faked it on the outside before people (hypocrite), and even though I tried to remain in denial to myself, I absolutely loved being honored and known as the owner of the Lord’s Gym.

There was a disgusting and hellish pride deep in my heart that I did not yet fully understand or see. My pride was augmented by my deep insecurity which I had felt since childhood. I wanted so much to be seen as valuable and to measure up in the eyes of men. I wanted their praise desperately because I did not yet know God or have His praise.

Joh 5:44 How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?

Left unchecked, a man’s pride will send him to hell. Pride really seems to be the source of the devil’s rebellion against God. It is a terrible and deeply ingrained evil that also lives in the hearts of man, but in God’s infinite wisdom, love and faithfulness, he seeks to expose it and purge it from the hearts of His elect. Man’s pride tells him, “*you are worthy...you are strong...you are capable...you are the boss...you are superior...you are unique...you are really something...go your own way...build your own life...do your own will...you are the king...you are the ruler of your life.*” Man’s pride separates him from the grace, mercy and presence of His God, the one who made him for his own pleasure and glory. This is a hellish sin and certainly the one God hates the most.

Pro 11:2 When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom. Pro 16:18 Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall. Pro 21:4 Haughty eyes and a proud heart, the lamp of the wicked, are sin! Isa 2:17 The arrogance of man will be brought low and the pride of men humbled; the LORD alone will be exalted in that day, Jas 4:6 But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

I don’t believe Paul knew the trouble I was in with the landlord and contractor already, but I told him that \$300,000 would only leave me walking away barely breaking even and with not enough to start over. He asked me to get back to him with a fair price. I put the word out to a few other people that we may be interested in selling the club, so I could get a better valuation of the business. Indeed, there was some interest and I got excited about selling the club to another Christian, rather than to a huge company like L.A. Fitness.

On April 20th, 2002, we received a letter of intent to purchase the gym for \$315k from a gentleman named Jeff. Unfortunately, this deal never went forward because the landlord created complications regarding him being able to take over the lease. They had leverage in this matter due to the pending litigation against us for backed rent. Knowing what I know now, I can see they would never have allowed another gym to take over our space, now that they wanted L.A. Fitness in there. We found out that L.A. was going to pay \$2.7 million for the property rather than leasing it. We would have to pay rent for 14 years before they could earn that kind of money from us. You can’t catch a bigger fish until you get the smaller fish off your hook.

Nothing was working out for me. I was still trying so hard to save myself and this business. I felt like God’s glory was somehow attached to this building since it had His name on it, and if it failed, I felt it would be such a poor reflection on Him. Oh, how blind I was to think God’s glory was attached this building and my silly business.

On the contrary, I see how the Father loves his children so much, even the foolish and simple minded like me. So much so that he is even willing to allow us to fail miserably and bring public shame to His name by our ignorance and yet he doesn’t throw us on the trash heap. He patiently allows us to try and fail

multiple times until we finally break and come humbly before Him to learn how to walk according to His Spirit, rather than our own good understanding and self-will.

I was sticking close to Marji and praying with her through all of this. One afternoon, I was walking back and forth on a curb in front of our gym while speaking to her on the phone about all the crisis. She was trying so hard to encourage me to keep the faith. As soon as I clicked end on the phone, I heard these words in my spirit, almost as if they were audible. *"It is going to get worse before it gets better, but do not be afraid. I am in control and this is about your character development."* I could not doubt that those words came from the Spirit of the Lord, as a warning, but they contradicted everything my faith was believing for.

Over the next several months, the battle waged in the lawsuits, but I continued to sell memberships and move forward in all my might while calling it faith. As we continued to try to market and grow the business, we were slowly running out of money and getting further and further behind. Each time the leasing agent called me about rent, I told him I would pay them the rent when they helped me get back the \$121k stolen from me by the contactor he insisted I use. In addition to trying to grow our business as fast as we could, now we were having to pay legal fees on three separate cases, the contractor, negotiations with L.A. Fitness, and now the landlord.

Since we had still been unable to pay and refused to pay any rent until this was resolved with the contractor, on April 4th, 2002, the landlord scheduled a hearing with a Judge, in the Orange County Circuit Court, to have us evicted from the property. Before the hearing, we filed a motion to stay the eviction and to consolidate the cases between the builder and the landlord. I remember driving to the courthouse, feeling like Abraham putting Isaac up on the altar. I felt like this gym was our first baby. We had been in labor with it for so long. I was afraid, but I was clinging to hope in God.

Incredibly, the court honored our motion to stay and ordered that we were to pay into the court registry a sum of \$32k, an amount equal to two months' rent. The court also ordered us to both immediately engage in discovery to demonstrate enough evidence to create an issue of fact as to whether the landlord was engaged in a conspiracy with the contractor against us. After the hearing was over, I stepped into the elevator where the court reporter disclosed her shock. She said, *"I have never seen him do anything like that before; do you realize that judge just broke the law for you...the very law he wrote...you were supposed to escrow the entire amount of \$120k, not just two months' worth!"*

I believe we had 20 days to make the escrow deposit of \$32k or we would lose the case and be evicted by default. I maintained my faith in God, especially since I saw clearly what I believed was his favor in that court room.

Even though it was only two months' rent the court was requiring, we still didn't have the money. Our money had been growing wings and flying away as fast as it came in. Negotiations with L.A. Fitness to buy us out, was now my only hope of getting out of this mess and it was still looking pretty good. They would buy out all my member contracts and allow everyone to continue working out there, while they built the big club.

As the squeeze came upon me, I became quite willing and now even anxious to take Mr. Norris' original offer of \$300k, which I still hoped would get us back close to zero. Zero was now looking good to me if I knew that none of our members would lose their money. They would lose the Lord's gym, but they wouldn't be losing a gym. I kept hanging on every day waiting for them to call and move forward on buying us out. I started dreaming and longing to be free from this battle and all the chaos and stress.

The landlord scheduled another hearing after the time past for us to escrow the rent money, but Paul Norris and I were still moving forward in our talks and it looked like we were close to making a deal. Then came

8pm, the night of May 21st, 2002. I was standing in Jennifer's office talking with her when the front desk told me that my attorney was on the phone. The words he spoke to me were the scariest words I had ever heard in my life. *"Michael, I'm sorry. It's over. They have led you on. There is no deal with L.A. Fitness. They are not going to buy you out. They know you have run out of money. The landlord is going to appear before the judge tomorrow and they are going to be issued a writ of possession of your property by 10am in the morning. You have until then to get everything you can out of that space. They will be there with the Sheriff in the morning to change the locks and they will rightfully own whatever you have left in there."*

Please, before I continue let me pause and make sure you understand that I have no ill will toward L.A. Fitness at all. They are a for profit business, not a Christian charity. Jesus himself said in Luke 16:15, *"The people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light."* What they did was very good for their business and shareholders, just not for *me* (Praise God! Today I can laugh as I write this). They simply out played me and God was pleased to allow it. Father was at work, not to make me a successful Christian gym owner, but to free me from my pride, my self-sufficiency, my own understanding and from doing my own will.

It was a terrifying experience though. I hung up with my attorney, my knees buckled and I collapsed in my chair and the blood must have drained out of my face. I slammed my hand down on my desk and heard those same words again, *"It is going to get worse before it gets better, but do not be afraid. I am in control and this is about your character development."* My first thought was, *"How in the world could this possibly get any worse than it is?"* I'm about to tell you how in the next chapter.

Chapter 8

The single worst day of my life.

It was 8pm on Tuesday night May 21st, 2002. My attorney had just spoken the most terrifying words to me that I had ever heard, *"Mike, it's all over...I'm sorry."* This was the end of our five-year dream. All was shattered, and I was overwhelmed with fear and dread. What in the world was I going to do now. As I hung up the phone with him, that's when I again heard those same words in my spirit, which I knew were from God, *"It is going to get worse before it gets better, but do not be afraid. I am in control and this is about your character development."*

It was now 8pm and the gym closed each night at 10pm. I immediately went and started explaining to the employees that I didn't have time to give them the details but that we were finished, and I desperately needed any help they could give me to get as much of the stuff we owned and had paid cash for, out of the club and to our house. I even rounded up a few members who knew us and loved us. A few people went home and got trucks and came back to help us move. I was walking around in total shock, feeling like my head had just been dismembered from my body by a sharp sword. I can feel it in my stomach even now, when I think back on this terrifying night.

About twenty people worked with us all night long to take as much stuff as we could possibly get out of that 10,000 square feet gym. A few guys took out all the lockers from the bathrooms, we got the stereo system, the cabinets we built, all the plate weight, our dumbbells, the TV's, the flooring in the group fitness, all our supplies, the pro-shop merchandise, furniture, and toys from the child care. I couldn't believe how

much we were able to get out of the gym in just eight hours. It was incredible. Obviously, we had to leave all of the actual large fitness equipment, treadmills and ellipticals.

We finished at 4am, just one hour before we were supposed to open and when members would show up. I typed up a note to hang on the door with a contact phone number and told them we would be in touch soon to explain what had happened. We went home in shock and completely exhausted. I tried to go straight to sleep.

It was now May 22nd, 2002. I was woken up around 9am by a phone call from a news reporter named Roger Locey from our local Channel 9 news station in Orlando, FL. He sounded so empathetic and genuinely concerned about what had happened to us and wanted to hear our story. He asked me if I would meet him at the gym at 10am and tell the story. I felt relieved and saw this as an opportunity to quickly communicate to our members that we had been badly taken advantage of and that this was not something we thought was going to happen, so I agreed to meet him.

On my way to the gym, I spoke with my attorney about what I was doing and as I'm pulling into the shopping center to meet the reporter, he said, *"Mike, you cannot talk to the media about anything relating to this court case because it is currently in litigation. You have to keep your lips sealed."*

I thought to myself, *"what in the world am I supposed to do now?"* Sleep deprived and running on sheer adrenaline, I found myself getting out of the car and walking up the gym door like I was in a fog. I could see a bunch of members and people standing around talking, but I had no idea what was about to happen.

As I stepped up on the sidewalk in front of the gym entrance, the top two news channels in Central Florida whipped out their cameras and lights on me and immediately started firing off pointed questions, not as if they were really concerned about what had happened to us, but as if we were criminals. They had found a few members who had just paid for an annual membership in full and by the time I got there, they had those members already fired up and ready to confront me on camera. I couldn't believe this was happening. I had showed up hoping to communicate that I had been badly taken advantage of as young Christian business owner, and instead I was now being accused of being a criminal who took everyone's money on purpose.

L.A. Fitness moved into our space within three days as a temporary gym and pre-sale center while their huge club was being built. It was surreal to drive by and see L.A. Fitness banners now up where the Lord's Gym sign was just days earlier. The people working out were paying L.A. Fitness and yet they were working out in the building I paid so much money to construct and yet now had nothing to show for it. I found myself thinking, *"Hey, that's our \$150k worth of fitness equipment, which I still owe about \$100k on that you are now making money from while your members are sweating all over it...hey, that's our \$4,000 worth of window tint which is keeping your members cool...that's our \$9k electrical system...our lights...our air conditioning system...our gym flooring...our artwork on the wall...our childcare area, etc."* I could see in the windows at night when I drove by and I could see they were selling memberships at our front desk. I thought, *"hey...that's our front desk and those are our cabinets where my friend Tip Killingsworth and I spent several days installing them by ourselves to save money."*

It was just a horrible feeling to see all of this. It made me literally feel sick to my stomach. It must be similar in some way to the feeling a man or woman has when they come home and find their spouse in their own bed with someone else. To me, it felt like the twisting of a knife which had already been plunged deep into my heart.

The news story ran about five nights in a row on the local news to hundreds of thousands of people in Central Florida. They had found some other members who had paid in full, but who didn't know Jennifer

and I personally or our hearts for the gym and the members. They went to their house to interview them. One man said about me, *“He took our money knowing they were going to close...that’s criminal.”* The truth is, as you know from hearing the whole story now, is that we didn’t know we were going to close. L.A. Fitness had led us to believe a deal was in the works right up until the last minute.

Unfortunately, gyms going out of business and people losing money is something that happens all too often, so the media jumps on those stories like sharks to blood. They twisted and distorted our story so badly that we became prisoners in our own home for nearly 6-months. We wouldn’t even go to a grocery store within 5 miles of our house for that entire time. We never went out or went for walks or appeared in public unnecessarily. We stayed home all the time and only answered the door when it was the sheriff’s department delivering another lawsuit or court order.

Contrary to the words which that lady or angel spoke to me in church that morning, God’s name was now being shamed by me, not glorified by me. What a horrible feeling to have done something in the name of God and then watch it end in such a scandalous disaster. Perhaps I can now better understand what it would be to desire to have a mountain fall on you. Nevertheless, God was so merciful and was only going to allow me to feel so much shame and guilt before He began to bring some comfort.

For he wounds, but he also binds up; he injures, but his hands also heal. – Job 5:18

We had given the media a phone number with an answering machine for our members to call. We received about a hundred messages and only two of them were ugly. Jennifer and I had personally sold more than 600 of the membership agreements through our pre-sale office before the gym opened. As a result, we got to know quite a few of our members personally. Most of them realized we were just a young couple trying to operate a Christian gym and bring God glory, not slick business owners trying to scam people. Many people expressed their sadness for us and told us they were praying for us and even stated that we don’t owe them anything. We even had a few members bring cooked food to our door because they knew we had been traumatized.

I remember running into this one engineer who had joined and always gave me a hard time at the gym. He had a dry sense of humor and was a tough cookie to please. He regularly hounded me when the gym had opened, about not having all the equipment yet. He had paid for a family membership in full for an entire year and had now lost the remaining three months’ worth of his membership money since we had closed. I saw him at breakfast at a local diner and I was afraid of how he might respond. He responded with such compassion that I was really surprised. He said, he completely forgave us and that we owed him no money. He even wished us well.

These kinds of things and several others were clearly God’s grace to us. God knew I needed this encouragement. I was so disgusted with the media’s twisted covering of the story that I sent them a letter regarding the fact that they had sent a reporter who claimed to be a Christian and then who slayed me on television without telling anyone the whole truth. Roger Locey personally called me and apologized after receiving my letter and I forgave him, but the damage was already done. By now, there were rumors that we had taken all the members money and bought a new \$70k Mercedes or that we had moved to the Bahamas.

The true story was that I was ruined and now had nearly \$500k in business debt which I owed even though my business was practically stolen from me. Even while L.A. Fitness was still using all of our equipment, the lawsuits from the companies who we leased it all from started coming in. I opened the door at our home on Thanksgiving Day 2002, to a Sheriff serving me yet another lawsuit.

This time of my life was the closest I had ever come to thinking suicide was a good option to escape what I was facing. I had just lost everything in such a public and humiliating way. I was now being slandered each night on the news and at the same time, Jennifer became so bitter towards me, exclaiming that I had just ruined her life financially. She felt that I was the one who did all of this to her and I was the one who forced her to co-sign with me on the debts we incurred. All she could think about was how much debt she was now personally responsible for because of what I had done to her. Ironically, she never again had to work outside of our home or personal business for the remainder of our marriage.

This is how it was throughout the marriage. When I was winning in life or business, she wanted to be my partner and wanted an executive title right alongside of me. However, as soon as failure came, she no longer wanted anything to do with it and would immediately turn against me and blame me for everything.

I heard brother Zac Poonen from CFC in Bangalore, India preaching one time that he felt Judas Iscariot was probably a loyal supporter of Jesus in the beginning. He suggested that Judas might have been motivated by the idea of being promoted into a high position of honor and power by being a follower of the “Messiah” who was to be the KING over Israel. However, when he realized that Jesus was not coming up from walking the lowly path before men, he turned against Christ.

It’s not hard me to imagine that what Zac was saying, may well be true. Here’s what is so ironic to me personally about Judas. Jennifer told me, as she was separating from me (more on this later in the story), that I was worth more to her dead than alive. She was referring to the fact that I had life insurance. Ironically, Judas clearly felt the same way about Jesus. He betrayed Jesus to His death for thirty pieces of silver.

My lowest point in this disaster came after we had run out of things to sell and I had to break Tyler’s piggy bank to come up with \$6 dollars in change to buy him some more formula. I then spent 6-months questioning everything I knew about life, God, faith, business and success. I just kept asking God, “Why... Why... Why... Why...?”

Pro 19:3 A man’s own folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the Lord.

I was overcome with grief and confusion. Everything I thought I knew about God and faith all proved to be a lie. I cried and cried in great pain and distress and just kept asking God why for about six months. I analyzed and reanalyzed everything trying to find the meaning in it all. I brainstormed repeatedly over the details of what did happen, and what might have happened, if only I had done this or that differently. I got trapped in trying to make my own meaning out of the madness. Paralysis of analysis had set in and I was in a tailspin, not even able to function in daily life much.

*Pro 3:5-6 Trust in the Lord with all of your heart and **lean not on your own understanding**; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.*

One day, God used one page in a book to help me get out of the mental tailspin I was in. He showed me that I had gone wrong when I ignored His yield signs, and instead just kept pushing forward apart from His will. He had given me strong checks in my mind and spirit regarding doing business with Vince the Mormon, and with John Freehling who was clearly desiring money more than He was God. Incidentally, John got off a public bus at a random stop and dropped dead at the age of 41 on April 22nd, 2003, 11 months to the day after our gym closed. As best as I can remember it was believed to be an issue in his heart due to the use of steroids.

God had also given me checks in my spirit about signing that contract with the builder. He gave me checks about taking the loan from my neighbor Steve and about him also co-signing on the business loan with us. He gave me checks about personally guaranteeing the lease for the Gym space.

Pro 2:11 Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you.

At each spiritual yield sign God gave me in my spirit, I simply ignored them and kept on going. In my mind, I was working for the glory of God and being so determined, nothing was going to stop me...except God!

Father helped me to see that all the details that had happened to me after I ignored those yield signs were completely irrelevant. They were simply the consequences of my disobedience and there was no need for me to spend time trying to make meaning out of them. The only meaning I needed was that I got ahead of Him and I failed to listen to his warnings when time after time, he showed me red flags surrounding the people I was yoking myself to in this project. I had been given ample evidence that this tree's fruit was rotten, and this was not a pleasing endeavor to God, but I didn't want to hear that because that got in the way of *my* strong desires, *my* good plans and *my* will being done.

I wonder how many people just read that and thought of the person they chose to marry? Perhaps God warned them over and over, but they pushed ahead and now suffer the terribly painful consequences. Those people should keep reading because ignorance and stubbornness isn't something God *can't* work through and redeem. The only thing I see that God can't do anything with, is our stubborn pride and the lack of humility to be honest about our mistakes.

Again, I was not guilty before the eyes of men of being an evil person, but before God I was guilty of being prideful, stubborn, and obstinate. I was guilty of making several unwise and ungodly alliances to build the Lord's Gym. I had such high hopes to be able to use the gym to minister to God's people. At one time, we had over 50 World Vision children which we had adopted monthly through a portion of our membership dues. I wanted so badly to do something good for God, but in the end, I was left with nothing but loss and destruction and heartache.

Psalm 127:1 Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain.

I had violated several Biblical principles in the word of God and now I was indeed reaping what I had sown. I guess I thought I might be an exception because I wasn't doing something man considers evil and because I was so zealous to do something to glorify God. I was dead wrong by leaning on my own understanding.

Gal 6:7 Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.

From this I learned that God not only doesn't show favoritism to men, but he also doesn't show favoritism to his own Word. Contrary to what we might think, I learned that God doesn't pay closer attention to the promises and blessings in His Word than He does the warnings and the violations. He was indeed watching over all the principles I was in violation of and He was seeing that they too were fulfilled.

Jer 1:12 The Lord said to me, "You have seen correctly, for I am watching to see that my word is fulfilled."

2 Chro 20:35-37 Jehoshaphat king of Judah made an alliance with Ahaziah king of Israel, who was guilty of wickedness. He agreed with him to construct a fleet of trading ships. After these were built...Eliezer...prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, "Because you have made an alliance with Ahaziah, the Lord will destroy what you have made." The ships were wrecked and were not able to set sail to trade.

Isa 30:1 Woe to the obstinate children, “declares the Lord”, “to those who carry out plans that are not mine, forming an alliance, but not by my Spirit, heaping sin upon sin.

These Scriptural principles are a perfect example of what Paul was explaining to Timothy in 2 Tim 3:15 about how he had known the holy Scriptures from infancy, which were able to make him wise for salvation, through faith in Christ Jesus. He was clearly referring to the wisdom of the Old Covenant Scriptures and principles since the New Testament had not yet been written. I was not yet living by the wisdom of these Scriptures and I was suffering as a result.

After the gym collapsed, I went through five job fiascos in less than 18 months, trying to get back on track and make enough money to start paying back the debts. With one frustrating disappointment after another, Jennifer lost all her remaining trust in my ability to provide for our family and we lived on the brink of divorce for months on end. I became desperately frustrated and began sinking lower and lower.

I thought I was at least catching my breath regarding the lawsuits and business disaster only to discover that the landlord, which is one of the largest shopping center developers in the country, had been waiting to come after us until after L.A. Fitness was moved out our space and into their own building. In October of 2003 they filed a Motion for Summary Judgment against us for over \$160k.

On October 14th, 2003 I was to be deposed by their attorney regarding their suit against me and the countersuit my attorney had filed before the gym closed. They wanted to put a lien on our home and on anything else we had to collect that \$160k in backed rent.

The night before I was deposed, I laid down in my bed to continue my Bible reading from where I had left off in the morning, and to seek God’s help in prayer. The next day I was facing a giant. If he didn’t help, we were going to be destroyed. I turned the page and there in the top left-hand side of the page, I read these words from - 2 Chronicles 20:17 “*You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you...do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you.*” Incidentally, I wrote the date and time this happened in my Bible margin. It was 9:11pm. This was long before God started showing me numbers or before I realized what the good promise of Psalm 91:1 was.

I remember their attorney was very confident and perceived a slam dunk win for his client. After he stated the complaint and the known facts he had of the case, I was given the opportunity to speak as I answered all their questions. Mind you, all of this was being recorded word for word by a stenographer and on audio. I wish I had that recording, because after I was given an opportunity to tell “my side of the story”, this man’s entire disposition and body language visibly changed. Perhaps directly by the Spirit of God, this man recognized that the tide had just been turned in my favor. I felt I could just keep going, but he seemed to want me to stop as if he had heard enough and would get back to me after he discussed these things with his client. I could see the victory before it came. God indeed fought for me. It was quite amazing to see it happen in person.

Acts 6:10 These men began to argue with Stephen, but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke.

How loving and merciful is our Father! Even after all the trouble I had brought upon myself and even more after all the shame I brought upon His name, He was still so kind to me and saved me when I cried out to Him in honesty of heart. Oh, Abba, I am beyond my ability to express my gratitude to you in words. Thank you Abba...thank you! You are so compassionate that you still saved a stubborn stiff-necked fool like me!

Psa 103:13-14 As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; (14) for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.

Psa 50:15 and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me."

Psa 149:4 For the LORD takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with salvation.

Just a few days later, I received a letter stating that if I would drop my suit against them, they would drop their suit against me. Here was one of the top shopping center developers in the country, who could outspend me in court a million times over, backing down from what had looked like a slam dunk win on the \$160k they were suing me for. God had just wiped out \$160k in debt just like that! I was so happy and so thankful. This was a miracle of his divine providence and I knew He was still with me and hadn't given up on me.

As we see in Hebrews 12, the good Father loves us enough to bring correction and discipline. But I am amazed at the amount of resources and time He will expend to discipline and save us. God is even willing to allow others to be hurt, in order to save his elect out of their ignorance or deception. I am humbled so low when I look at the amount of wasted money and time and hurt people God allowed, just to save me from my hellish pride and self-sufficiency. I cannot comprehend it. What kind of a love is this?

Isa 43:3-4 For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I give Egypt for your ransom, Cush and Seba in your stead. (4) Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you, I will give men in exchange for you, and people in exchange for your life.

I was encouraged by this win and deliverance from the Lord, but just a few days later on Saturday, October 18, 2003, I received the sad news that my dear sister and friend Marji Barboza had succumb to the cancer and passed away.

These several years were some really rough times for me. How in the world do you reconcile your entire belief and understanding of a good God with these types of tragic endings? If the devil were ever able to convince me to become an atheist, these were his best opportunities to try.

Tragically, this would not be the only devastating experience of unanswered prayer I would face. May 22nd 2002 was definitely the loneliest and darkest single day I have ever had in my life, as I stood before all those news cameras being crushed, but seven years later there would come a season in my life that was much darker and far more painful!

Chapter 9

God, Why Won't You Give Me Clear Direction

Naturally, I was giving much thought to all the disaster I had just gone through during the collapse of the Lord's Gym, and thinking about what was next in my life. On one hand I felt lost, and on the other hand I felt like I was being given the unique opportunity to start life all over again. It felt like I had a clean slate to work with, but I was afraid, and I was desperate for God's guidance this time.

I had been very humbled by this huge disaster and I didn't want to repeat this with another one of my "good" ideas or "good" plans for my life. I had been pleading with God for a long time to tell me what He

wanted me to do with my life. I might imagine the angels in heaven were saying, *“Well, well, well...look what we have here, Father. Guess who’s not looking so self-confident or self-sufficient these days? Apparently, someone has learned a lesson in the fire.”*

One day, about six months later, feeling lost, aimless, and without purpose, I was driving down the 408 East West Expressway in Orlando, FL fervently pleading with God for direction. I exclaimed, *“Please God, I don’t want to mess up like this again...please just tell me what to do this time and I will do anything you want me to do. Why do you make it so hard to know your will? Why won’t you just tell me exactly what you want me to do, like you did for people in the Old Covenant?”* Here would come the second time God spoke directly to me, not audibly, but so strongly in my mind as if it were audible just like He did with David in 1 Chronicles 28:12.

Job 36:15 – But those who suffer he delivers in their suffering; he speaks to them in their affliction.

After much pleading, His voice and answer came like an instant download. *“I do not always provide my children with immediate guidance and answers to their questions because they would quickly begin seeking the answers, rather than the Answer Giver. I am far more interested in your pursuing me, than I am in your doing everything perfect.”* Just as my little spiritually immature mind was being warped on this thought, he sent a personal illustration to sink it into my heart forever. *“Which would you prefer, for your son Tyler to never do anything wrong and to perfectly follow your every rule and command, but to do so without any real love and affection for you, or would you prefer an imperfect son who makes many mistakes while growing up, but who comes running and yelling, ‘Daddy, Daddy, Daddy’, when your garage door opens?”* The answer was obvious, and I can scarcely recall this moment without weeping. Father was showing me a part of His heart, and starting to teach me the difference between being an Old Covenant servant vs. being a New Covenant beloved son who then delights to serve his Father. My focus was on doing everything perfect and making no more mistakes in my life, but Father’s focus was on teaching me to pursue Him and love Him with all that I am.

Mark 12:30 – “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”

There are those in the Sola Scriptura camp, like John MacArthur, who go crazy when you say, *“God spoke to me”*, because they fear you are saying God taught you some new extra-biblical revelation. Their fears are warranted among many Charismatic groups where people run around saying, *“God said this, and God told me that...etc.”*, and all of it is a bunch of nonsense straight from their own imaginations. That’s how a lot of people including themselves get hurt and deceived in the process. However, the Sola Scriptura position goes to an unbiblical extreme, in my opinion, when it says God never speaks outside of His written Word.

One time, I heard John MacArthur say on a radio program that God had never once spoken to him outside of the Scripture in his entire life. That was the last day I could ever listen to John MacArthur. His belief that God no longer speaks, completely contradicts my entire Christian experience, my story and most importantly what I see in the Scripture and in the lives of many of His greatest saints.

Spiritual “experience” is another word they do not like because it is subjective to the individual, rather than the word of God. The good news is that instead of going to extremes, and saying God never speaks and there are no spiritual experiences that can be trusted, we can practice discernment and we can know all trees by the fruit they produce.

The stories you have already heard in this book, and the even greater stories that lie ahead would have never happened, if God did not speak a few very specific things directly to my spirit. Again, as you will see, God spoke to me things regarding my business failure, my divorce, my ministry, and my remarriage. All were spoken to me about what would happen in the future, and all of which came to pass. The speaking voice of God in my life, by His Spirit, has been authenticated multiple times not only by the words coming true, but also by the Christlike fruit it produced.

John 8:47 He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."

When God spoke to my spirit that day about loving Him and pursuing Him vs. simply trying to do everything just perfect, he wasn't telling me something that was some new extra-biblical revelation. No, it's right there in the Scriptures, even though I didn't know it at the time. See Matthew 15:8, Mark 12:30, 1 Corinthians 8:3, Revelation 2:2-4. Just as Paul says in 2 Timothy 2:7, the Lord was simply giving me insight into this and making it clear to me (See Phi 3:15).

One Bad Deal After Another

For the 18 months following the gym collapse, I was desperate to get what felt like a 500,000 lb. gorilla of debt off my back. Once again, all I could think about was money, but I didn't want the money this time to increase my lifestyle, now I wanted it, so I could be free from all the debt and shame of my failure. I saw him deliver me from the \$160,000 lawsuit from the gym collapse, so my whole focus was on getting God to help me restore the rest of my finances. All I could think about was just getting back to zero.

I was asked to share the gym testimony at church one time. After I finished, a couple came up to me and told me that they had been through something similar and that when the timing was right, God moved on someone's heart to give them a large amount of money to pay off their business debt and to restore their finances. I could not stop fantasizing about something like that happening to me one day. All my hopes were in one day just getting back to zero.

Rather than trusting God and continuing to wait on Him for his wise counsel and direction, I set off once again to deliver myself from the mess I was in. Since God wasn't giving me specific guidance, I just assumed I should focus on taking care of this huge financial problem I had. I was pursuing whatever I thought would make the most amount of money in the shortest period, and I figured once I was debt free, then I could put my focus on my relationship with God and doing what He asks next.

I hadn't yet realized that Father is first and foremost in the heart restoration business, not the circumstances or the checkbook restoration business. In fact, God wisely allows difficult circumstances and financial crises to be used to refine our hearts, which is what is most important to Him.

Romans 8:29 – For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

I couldn't see it then, but because my need was so great and the pressure so intense, money was still what I was putting all my trust in. Without consciously realizing it, money became my false god and master once again. Do you remember Paul's warning in 1 Timothy 6:10, that "*some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs*"? As hard as it is to believe, there was now about to come many more griefs into my life. This gives you an idea of just how stubborn and untamed my foolish heart was. God's patience in my life cannot possibly be measured. You will see more and more why He commanded me to tell this story. He comes out looking very, very good...just as HE INDEED IS!

Psalm 16:4 "The sorrows of those will increase who run after other gods."

I went through five frustrating and humbling work situations in those 18 months. I first went to work for the real estate advertising company that we tried to use to sell our home. Unfortunately, all the best leads were given to the most senior sales people and I could never earn enough income. I would drive an hour to an appointment, only to discover that the people had no money to advertise their property. I spent more time talking about God and praying with people in their homes, than I did writing up sales. I was blessed to do it, but it came to the point where I would pray, "*Father, I love praying with people, but I still have to earn a living...will I be making a sale today or just praying for more people?*" I had a few wonderfully divine encounters, but I only made it for a few months before I had to quit because I wasn't earning enough money.

Then, I went to work for a man who promoted an international speaker and sales trainer named Tom Hopkins. I was again on the road selling sales training and seminar tickets, but this time for someone famous. It didn't take long for me to remember my old secrets and to start setting sales records. I changed up their sales process from how they had been doing it for twenty years. They resisted initially, but soon I had doubled their average ticket sales per meeting. I became the top producing sales person and trainer among all the companies that were promoting Tom's seminars. Once again, my pride started to balloon because I was back associating with high income and famous business leaders.

However, the man who owned the promotion company I was working for was irresponsible, greedy, and dishonest. He made multiple promises to me that he never kept, and he changed my pay plan multiple times, so I once again found myself trapped. Around this same time, we discovered that Jennifer was pregnant with our first daughter Chelsea. Our marriage was still severely bruised from the gym collapse, and tensions were increasing with ever new job failure. I was once again feeling the insecurity of not being able to find a way to consistently provide for our financial needs, especially if I quit. Nothing I was doing was working out long term, and I was feeling that tremendous pressure again to prove that I wasn't a failure, especially with another baby on the way.

While I was on the road, Jennifer and I had a few email exchanges where she once again started threatening divorce. Her relationship with me was always conditional on my performance, exactly like the story I shared in the beginning of the book about Braveheart, the Gelada baboon in Ethiopia. As long as he was a good provider, he was accepted by the queen and her family, but as soon as he slacked off too much, she threatened his rule by having sex with another male monkey. It's terribly sad, how much we are all just like animals, mere creatures of natural instinct, apart from yielding to the Spirit of Christ. Living in constant fear of losing my wife's acceptance due to poor performance was terribly exhausting and stressful.

While still on the road promoting Tom Hopkins, several companies had tried to hire me directly to do their sales training. This eventually gave me the confidence to quit and start my own sales training company. I knew it would be a while before I could get enough business to survive, so while I was promoting my new sales training company, I started selling another gimmicky product called online shopping sprees. They

were discounted online shopping certificates that businesses could buy and give to their prospective customers for marketing and sales incentives. I started selling quite a few of them, especially to car dealers and it was supplementing our income. I then started going through my list of business contacts to let everyone know what I was now doing and selling.

I went to visit one of my old bosses from that very first sales trainer/motivational speaker that I had worked for. His name was Scott Morgan, and he had been the president of the company for a short time while I was working there. Now, Scott had built his own multi-million-dollar company in the car business. We had kept in touch infrequently via email, but I hadn't actually seen him in years.

After a few moments of small talk, Scott said, *"Mike, can I share something with you?"* I said, *"Sure"*. He said, *"I don't even read your emails anymore. Every time I turn around you are peddling something new. You are starting to remind me of one of those guys in Washington D.C. who walks up and opens his jacket and says, 'What will it be, watches, rings, or things? You are a relationship guy Mike, and you win in life through those relationships, but you are ruining your credibility with people man. You need to stop all this hokey stuff and pick one thing and do it better than anyone else."*

I was shocked and humiliated. These were such hard words to hear at such a vulnerable and needy time in my life, but I knew they were true and that I needed to hear them. This man was not even a Christian. God had used an unbeliever to rebuke me and correct me. Scott Morgan will always have a special place of respect in my heart, for being loving enough to speak the hard truth and rebuke me because he cared about me and my family. His example is an embarrassment to many of us Christians who are so afraid of offending someone, or of hurting their feelings with the truth.

Shortly after his talk, I stopped selling the shopping spree gimmick and I contracted my sales training out to a company in Atlanta, GA called Consumer Cash Rewards. They wanted my training to be used to teach sales people how to sell with their new rebate promotion program. They offered companies a competitive edge by allowing that company to offer their customers a consumer cash reward, where three years after the customer purchased their product, they could receive a substantial cash rebate by sending in their receipts and the required paperwork. The program was expected to be financially sound because of the number of people who would forget to send in their rebate or lose their paperwork by the third year. I really liked and believed in the company and the product. They took me to visit a few of their clients and I saw that people were legitimately using the program to increase their sales.

One of their clients was a large home improvement company in the Atlanta, GA area. Shortly after I did some training for this client, the two owners approached me and offered me a starting salary of \$120,000 plus bonuses if I would come to work for them and train their sales people. I didn't accept the position, but I started to see a trend where when this promotion company introduced me to these companies, the companies were seeing more value in my sales training, than they were in the cash reward program.

One time, we all flew to Las Vegas to a Time Share conference, where we ended up meeting the owner of a very exciting online interactive, video, training, testing, and reporting system. He was using the system primarily to help car dealers train their sales people, but he was now trying to reach other industries like Time Share.

The Cash Rewards guys wanted to use his technology to train their clients and they wanted me as the camera talent. Shortly after the show was over, the online training company flew out to meet us in Atlanta, where they set up the video studio and had me do a few training videos. Then they flew back to Vegas and edited the footage and built the online training demo. When I saw myself in their training system, I was blown away. This was before YouTube and online video was so big. We were all still struggling with low

bandwidth issues back then. These guys had figured out how to deliver beautiful, virtual background, training footage, all online with an entire assessment system built into it. Immediately, I thought this is what I need to get me off the road, now that my family is growing.

Soon, the Cash Rewards guys started placing more and more focus on selling my sales training and making money off me and I started getting really upset. They even set up a new training company business. I saw what they were doing, so I approached the owner of the online training company myself and told him I would like to work directly for his company, as a sale agent and then to put my own content in the system.

Then, after several months' worth of hard work for the Cash Rewards company, I discovered that the whole thing was a scam. When I found out and quit, they had the audacity to send me legal letters demanding back the \$35k they had already paid me. Here was yet another failure, but this time I didn't lose all hope because now I was going to get into the online sales training business.

The owner of the online sales training system and his partner had started the company several years earlier and were still struggling to make enough sales to keep it going. The owner even had to go back to selling cars a few times to keep the lights in the business on. When he learned of my past sales performance, he was very excited about me being a part of the team.

He also claimed to have been brought up Christian and believed in Christ, so in spite of the Las Vegas atmosphere that the company was in, I took some relief from this and was excited to go to work for him. They trained me in Vegas and then I flew back home and went out as an independent contractor and sold \$750,000 worth of contracted business in less than 6 months. This was more than they had sold companywide in the past two years. My commission was 20%, which was paid monthly as the clients paid their monthly fees over a two or three-year agreement. I was so excited about this product and now I finally had a decent residual income that would come in each month. I was confident that the stress between Jennifer and I and all my financial struggles were finally over.

As my sales increased, I became the hero of the company to the technical team who were working so hard on a product that hadn't been selling much for the last few years. I even brought in their first large dealer group, the Coggin Auto Group in Jacksonville, Florida. Instead of being excited that he had found a top producing sales person, and that his company was now growing and finally doing well, the owner became jealous of me.

1Sa 18:8-11 Saul was very angry; this refrain galled him. "They have credited David with tens of thousands," he thought, "but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?" (9) And from that time on Saul kept a jealous eye on David. (10) The next day an evil spirit from God came forcefully upon Saul. He was prophesying in his house, while David was playing the harp, as he usually did. Saul had a spear in his hand (11) and he hurled it, saying to himself, "I'll pin David to the wall." But David eluded him twice.

As I spent more time around him, I could see that his lifestyle was that of a fully committed unbeliever and sinner. He even started persecuting me for my faith in God when I spent time with him and didn't find their office humor or lifestyle choices appealing. Selfishly, I remember thinking how can God bless me in my sales, if this guy is living like the devil. I started talking to him about God more and more and I really wanted to see him fear and obey God. One day, I questioned his sexual relationships with women and how he reconciled that to the "Christian" faith he claimed he had grown up with. He said, "Chriswell, doesn't the Bible say it's better to spill your seed in the belly of whore than on the ground." I couldn't believe the contempt he showed for God's word, and I became so frustrated about this man. Again, here was another

nice guy, fun to be around, very smart, calling himself a Christian, and yet living like the majority of people that visit the town he lived in.

I stayed busy on the road, or on the phone from my home in Orlando, FL, so I didn't have to see him that often. One day, I contacted him about the fact that I still did not have a signed agent agreement with their company. The company was growing, and more sales agents were coming on board, so I wanted a protected sales territory, and I wanted to know that I had an agreement with the company to be paid for all this business I was bringing in. I also mentioned that I was a bit concerned about their cash flow since my paychecks were starting to show up late.

That's when he went full blown "King Saul" on me and tried to pin me to the wall with a verbal spear. He informed me in a very harsh tone, that I would serve the clients I sold, only until he felt they were better served by someone else. He said, "*Chriswell, these are my accounts, not yours, and I can take them away from you at any time I want, are we clear?*" I was shocked, and immediately realized I had no loyalty or security from this guy whatsoever. I was terrified about the implications of this and I again felt like such a fool. I had contracted all that business for his fledgling company, leveraging my sales relationships, and now I had no certainty of being paid for any of it going forward.

I kept my cool and just tried to appease him, but inside I knew I was done and needed to figure something else out soon. After a year and a half of one bad work deal after another, here was yet another failure. I could just imagine how Jennifer was going to react to this news and I was scared to death. This is when I started thinking about the possibility of developing my own online training system and starting my own business to break free from this guy, but once again, I didn't have enough money to do something like that, and now I had no guarantee of my future paychecks that were due.

I knew I could just go back and focus on building my sales training company, but I was so confused about my life purpose and what God wanted me to do with my life. My marriage was on the verge of collapse and I was once again losing hope.

On December 6th, 2004, after desperately looking for answers in the books of men, I found myself having a life purpose crisis while sitting at the Barnes and Noble in Waterford Lakes Town Center. I sat down and journaled the following two pages which proved to be a crossroads and turning point for the direction of my life.

11-6-04

IT'S A MONDAY NIGHT, I'M SITTING AT BARNES & NOBLE. AS I SEARCH FOR BOOKS, I FIND MYSELF STRUGGLING TO FIND THE GOD GIVEN PURPOSE FOR MY LIFE. MY OWN ABILITY TO THINK, ANALYZE & UNDERSTAND SEEMS TO GET IN THE WAY? I REMAIN SKEPTICAL OF BOOKS THAT CLAIM TO HELP YOU FIND PURPOSE OR TO SET AND ACHIEVE GOALS. THEY SOUND SO PROMISING, BUT I REFRAIN FROM BUYING IT. WHERE IS GOD IN THE VISIBLE PLANNING OF MY LIFE? EVERYONE LIKES TO SAY "GOD HAS A PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE" - IF SO WHAT IS IT? BEING AN EXAMPLE OF CHRIST IS SO OBVIOUS, LOVING GOD & SEEKING HIS FACE IS SO OBVIOUS. WHAT ABOUT THE REST OF MY LIFE? WHAT ABOUT MY OCCUPATION & BUSINESS? AM I ALLOWED TO JUST PICK SOMETHING & GO FOR IT? IS THE SKY THE LIMIT? HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH? HOW BIG DO I MAKE MY VISION? ISN'T IT ALL A CHASING AFTER THE WIND, ANYWAY? THERE IS THAT PART OF ME THAT WANTS TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN BUSINESS, BUT I'M AFRAID I MIGHT LEAN MY LADDER AGAINST THE WRONG ROOF. I SEE ALL THESE BUSINESS MAGAZINES & A PLETHORA OF BUSINESS ADVICE ON HOW TO SUCCEED. I INSTANTLY FEEL SKEPTICAL & SHRUG IT OFF AS A WASTE OF TIME... BUT IS IT? THE BIBLE DOES SAY THAT I AM TO WORK, BUT HOW MUCH? HOW DO I BALANCE IT W/ MY RELATIONSHIP W/ GOD & FAMILY? THERE ARE TIMES I FEEL SO PASSIONATE ABOUT GOD THAT I WISH I COULD JUST READ HIS WORD ALL DAY, BUT THERE ARE DAYS THAT MY READING GOES PAST 9:00AM ORSO & I START FEELING GUILTY BECAUSE I'M NOT WORKING. IS IT OK FOR ME TO REALLY GO AFTER WHAT I'M PASSIONATE ABOUT? WHAT DO I GO AFTER? WHY DO I FEEL SO BAD ABOUT WORKING HARD AT SOMETHING? I FEEL LIKE I STILL HAVE A TENDENCY TO SELF SABOTAGE MY SUCCESS. I'M SO AFRAID OF ^{ACHIEVING} UNGODLY SUCCESS, THAT I SEEM TO BE PARALYZED TOWARDS ANY SUCCESS. GOAL SETTING SEEMS SELFISH TO ME, BASED ON MY VIEW OF GOD.

IF I REALLY AM A CHILD OF GOD & HE REALLY DOES HAVE A PLAN FOR MY LIFE, WHO AM I TO SAY WHAT I'LL DO W/IT? THE BIBLE SAYS "MAN MAKES HIS PLANS, BUT THE LORD DIRECTS HIS FOOTSTEPS"... WHAT DOES THAT REALLY MEAN? DOES IT MEAN THAT IF I CONTINUE TO SEEK GOD'S FACE, I CAN PURSUE A PARTICULAR CAREER PATH UNTIL HE CLOSES THE DOOR? WHY DID GOD MAKE IT SO EASY TO HEAR HIS PLANS FOR SOMEONE IN THE BIBLE, BUT I FEEL LIKE I'M ALL ALONE ON FIGURING OUT MY LIFE. I ONLY WANT WHAT THE LORD WANTS FOR MY LIFE, BUT I CAN'T HEAR HIM OR HE DOESN'T SEEM TO GIVE ME SPECIFICS. DOES THAT MEAN I CAN JUST GO FOR IT AND NOT WORRY ABOUT FAILURE? WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THE SCRIPTURE "COMMIT YOUR WAYS UNTO THE LORD & YOUR PLANS WILL SUCCEED? WHO'S PLANS WILL SUCCEED? IS IT REALLY THE ONE'S I COME UP WITH? I'M SO CONFUSED ABOUT ALL OF THIS AND I CAN'T SEEM TO FIND SOLID ANSWERS. THERE ARE HUNDREDS OF BOOKS IN THIS STORE RIGHT NOW... ALL CLAIM TO HAVE THE ANSWERS, SOME SEULAR, SOME CHRISTIAN. I'M ALMOST AS SKEPTICAL W/THE CHRISTIAN ONE'S AS I AM W/THE SEULAR ONE'S BECAUSE IT'S SO EASY TO GET A TWISTED VIEW OF GOD. THERE IS SOMETHING PROFOUND W/THE FACT THAT EVEN AFTER ALL I HAVE BEEN THROUGH, I FIND MYSELF RELUCTANT TO OFFER ADVICE OR COUNSEL TO OTHERS. I WAS MUCH QUICKER TO OFFER THIS IN THE PAST BEFORE I FAILED. NOW I QUESTION MORE THAN EVER HOW MUCH I REALLY KNOW ABOUT GOD & HIS WAYS. AFTER ALL, I'M STILL TRYING TO FIGURE OUT MY OWN BELIEF SYSTEM ABOUT HIS PART IN MY LIFE. WHEN I GET TO HEAVEN THE FIRST QUESTION I WILL ASK GOD IS "LORD WHAT WAS YOUR PART & WHAT WAS MINE"

LORD, PLEASE GIVE ME UNDERSTANDING IN THIS !!

YOUR SON,
MICHAEL

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Incredibly, just a few days after I wrote this, the owner of the company called me and started acting like I was his good buddy. He was so excited and wanted to invite me to be a part of some amazing new opportunity that had popped up.

Sylvester Stallone, the movie star, was working on creating a fitness and nutrition program that he and his team wanted to sell online with some type of video training system. Stallone learned about our online training system through a referral and he wanted a demo. Based on my enthusiastic presentation of the system and my sales success with it so far, the owner wanted me to fly out and come to Stallone's house to

do the actual presentation. I thought to myself, “*Wow, what an opportunity God might be giving me here.*” I started getting so excited about getting to meet Sylvester Stallone and going to his house. My money loving heart started fantasizing once again about the financial gain that might come out of something like this. It’s disgusting for me to look back on this and see what I was thinking and feeling. I was no different than a drug addict, except that my drug was legal and loved by everyone around me.

Let me pause the story here for a few minutes and add an important detail, along with a disclaimer. For the previous two years or so, I had a Christian life coach named Larry. Larry approached me after I gave my testimony at church and offered to give me six months of free life coaching since he was just getting started. I ended up really liking it, and I paid Larry after the six months to keep going for another five years or so. We talked just about every Monday morning and Larry and I became great friends. Many times, he was such an encouragement to me during that terribly unstable time of my life.

I love my friend Larry very much and I was so thankful for his love for me, but in my love for God and His truth, I must include a disclaimer right here. Even though I participated in “Christian” life coaching for over five years, today, I am completely against it. I only believe in discipleship and Biblical counsel, straight from the word of God. For two thousand years, men and women of God, many with far greater struggles than you and I, have all found all they needed for life and godliness right from the perfect Word of God.

Unfortunately, no matter how much we try to call it “Christian” life coaching, or “Christian” counseling, these programs are all fundamentally based on human wisdom, psychology, and the basic principles of this world, and then someone has added the word of God to them. In God’s kingdom there is no need for some new man-made thing called “life coaching” or “Christian counseling”. All we need is discipleship straight from the Word of God.

My friend Larry loves the Lord, and he shared many Scriptures in his teaching, but the life coaching brought all kinds of extra man-made principles into our meetings that only watered down and took away from the power of the pure undiluted Word of God. Some of those other principles were exciting to my ears and they encouraged me for a time, but they lacked the power to change my heart permanently. God will not honor the power of His word, when it is watered down with the “good ideas” of men made of dust.

Most people find it hard to believe that the word of God is all sufficient because they have such small faith. Instead, their human understanding says, “*Well, God gave us brains and intelligence and wisdom and there is nothing wrong with coming up with principles that help us all to improve our lives.*” In the physical matters of life, i.e.. designing a new medical device, or building a house, I certainly agree, but when it comes to matters of the heart and soul, I couldn’t disagree more. You may receive temporary results, but over time they will fade, and you will begin to drift backwards, farther and farther from the truth and power of God’s word in your life.

2 Timothy 3:15-17 ...from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. (16) All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, (17) so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Colossians 2:8 See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

2 Peter 1:3 His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

The temptation to add to God's word can be immense, especially in the West where we are all taught to create a niche market for ourselves and to prove ourselves as an expert in some way. We all want to feel like we have some unique offering or value to offer others. As a reformed motivational speaker, I know firsthand how tempting this can be. If all I do is preach the word of God, what do I have that came from me, that I can then use to distinguish myself and my value from others? I have nothing, and therefore I am dependent on God for my praise, my provision, and my value.

1 Corinthians 4:6 Now, brothers, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, "Do not go beyond what is written." Then you will not take pride in one man over against another. 7 For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?

The humility and faith that truly pleases God is where we finally realize we are nothing and God is everything. Instead, most of us are still so alive in our flesh that we want honor for ourselves through some "special sauce" we came up with.

John 7:16-18 Jesus answered, "My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. (18) He who speaks on his own does so to gain honor for himself, but he who works for the honor of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him.

The only way we can honor God is to stick with and honor His words alone, not the words of men. If you listen to some of my messages on YouTube or iTunes Podcast, you may hear me sometimes share 50 or more passages of Scripture in a single recording. That is because Father asked me to memorize massive amounts of His words, before I had any real public ministry. It was so difficult, and I often struggled to do it, but today I see clearly why He asked me to do it. In my messages, I can quote His powerful words, rather than simply fill the audio up with all of my own words, because I still don't know His.

Also, if you listen, you will notice that I do not add any secular or psychological principles that aren't in the Bible to my teachings. There is nothing new, nothing clever, nothing unique about my teachings. It is all based strictly on the Word of God lived out, in accordance with the light I have been given from the Holy Spirit. All of the other words I use in my recordings or books are simply stories or explanations to help someone better understand the Biblical principles I am teaching, not some new technique of my own. I truly have nothing that didn't come from Him, or from one of God's beloved servants before me.

1Pe 4:10-11 Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. (11) If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God.

Now, back to the story which will even further make my point. Before my life purpose crisis happened, Larry had been life coaching me for quite a few years encouraging me through all my griefs and successes. With my most recent bad news about the owner of the company I was working for, I told Larry I was going to make the sacrifice and live according to my Christian values and get away from this company, no matter what it took.

However, when I got the call about the Sylvester Stallone opportunity, the temptation to stay with the company became overwhelming and I started going back and forth for days about what to do. The pressure of the gym debt was still there enticing me to say yes so, I could deliver myself. Even though I knew the owner of our company was a corrupt character, I couldn't stop thinking about what an incredible

opportunity this one last deal might be. That sounds like the heroin addict whose been saying for three years, *“just one last hit, and then I’ll quit.”*

Even Larry could see that there were no life coaching methods that could help me in this situation. This was spiritual warfare and only God could help me. This is when he gave me the best life coaching advice he ever gave me in five and a half years. He said, *“Michael, you need to take an emergency break. I strongly recommend that you get out of town somewhere by yourself for several days and really go position yourself to hear from the Lord about all of this.”*

That sounded like a great idea to me, but I had two challenges, a disagreeable wife and lean finances, but God overcame both obstacles. In what seemed like a true miracle, Jennifer not only didn’t resist me going, but she actually agreed with Larry that it would be a good thing for me to do so. I then found an affordable flight for the very next week, so I hopped on a plane and flew to the Bahamas. I had no agenda, other than to hear from God, and I had no idea what to expect, but this journey of faith was about to become the three most important spiritual days of my life so far.

Chapter 10

Much Needed Sanctuary with God

Psalm 42:2 – My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?

As I boarded the plane, I was excited and filled with a sense of great anticipation. I knew that this wasn’t just some silly personal justification I had come up with, to run from my problems, or to take a vacation. No, the two people closest to me, had both confirmed that I needed to do this. Not only that, but God had confirmed it in a very specific way, in a moment of His divine providence.

The same night I had journaled in that Barnes and Noble, all those raw questions I had about my life and purpose, the book *Dream Giver* by Bruce Wilkinson, jumped out at me while standing in front of the Christian book section. I recognized the book from about six months earlier, when a lady sitting next to me on a plane went on and on about how much she was enjoying it.

I was so hungry for some encouragement and direction that I read the entire book right there in the store. After having doubts about whether I should leave town to go be alone with God, I was astounded when I read these words in the book.

“God will ambush you with an invitation to stand in His presence, to come closer, to see further. I call this experience Sanctuary. Most Dreamers emerge from the Wasteland feeling spiritually and emotionally depleted. Our relationship with God has been tested and, in many cases, damaged by distrust. Often, we’re in worse shape than we realize. What our spirits desperately need is time away for comfort, restoration, and transformation. Unlike the previous stages of your journey, Sanctuary is an oasis, not an obstacle. It’s a pause where you’re invited to meet with God to be renewed and to make decisions that will radically affect the rest of your journey.”

Let me please insert another personal disclaimer here. I have learned many truths from many different preachers and teachers over the years, but just because they are a part of my story, that does not mean that I still agree with all of their major doctrines, or that I endorse their teaching. Unfortunately, the more I

have learned about God's word and ways, the less men I have found who are teaching what is in accord with clear sound doctrine, and who are free from denominational influence in what they teach.

Let me also be fair to say that I have yet to find even one teacher who I have agreed with entirely on every single point. This even includes my four favorites, A.W. Tozer, Andrew Murray, George Muller, and Zac Poonen. I could be wrong, but it seems to me that God has allowed this lack of perfect unity on all doctrines so that it's not as easy for us to put our hope in a man, rather than in God. But, for me personally, there are fundamental lines and doctrines, which when a man crosses, make it very difficult for me to continue to listen to the rest of what he is preaching, even if it's truth. This is where discernment is important, so that we can distinguish between ignorance and deception, good and evil, truth vs. error.

For example, I didn't lose my respect for Tozer's Spirit filled teachings when I first learned he believed all Christian movies and acting, which began as a pagan art, are in violation of Biblical principles, even Gospel films. I should point out that this is almost a moot point with me now because I watch so very few, but if Tozer were still alive, I would indeed enjoy sharing with him what a blessing the original movie "The Gospel of John", with Henry Ian Cusick has been to me over the last 10 years or so. It's my favorite all-time movie, nevertheless, perhaps Tozer has more light on that than me, or perhaps my faith is stronger than his in that area and for now he and I can simply agree to disagree.

Romans 14:1 Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters.

However, when a man teaches you can't please God if you aren't tithing, or that there is absolutely nothing you can do to lose your salvation, that shows a significant level of either ignorance, deception, or compromise in some fundamental truths of God's word. Nevertheless, God was still pleased to use a few men, that I am no longer in doctrinal accord with, to guide me or teach me some truths along the way.

We serve a Romans 8:28 God, who works all things together for the good, to those who love Him and who are called according to His purpose. Just as rat poison is 98% nutritious, we can sometimes find lots of truth preached even among even the worst of false teachers, but that doesn't mean they are right with God, or that once our eyes have been opened to see their error, that we should continue to listen to them. When we know better, we should choose better. Nevertheless, I knew when I read those words in Bruce's book, this was a clear confirmation that I was supposed to take this trip in faith.

Early on the morning of Monday December 13th, 2004, I boarded the plane. As we got closer, I looked out the window of the plane, and down upon the crystal blue waters of the Bahama Islands. I felt a sense of excitement and anticipation building in my heart. I remember thinking, "*This is real...I'm really doing this. I'm going far away simply to be isolated from everyone and to hear from God.*" Everything in my heart had been so murky and disorienting for so long, and I longed to be able to see the next chapter of my life, as clearly as I could see through those crystal blue waters.

It may sound bizarre, but I had also been feeling intimidated about this trip because I didn't know how to just be still and do *nothing*. I had been running for so many years, that the concept of being still before God was foreign to me and seemed very unproductive. To help give me some direction, I took a copy of Charles Stanley's book, *How to Listen to God*, and read most of it on the trip there.

All these years later, I can't remember a single thing I read in that book, but I know the biggest thing it did for me, was to increase my faith that God would indeed give me clear guidance for my life. Unfortunately, I have to include the same disclaimer here regarding Charles Stanley. For several years I had such great respect and affection for him, until God opened my eyes to the error of things like denominationalism, sabbath keeping, tithing, and most importantly the "once saved always saved" doctrine.

Once I got settled in at my hotel, I caught a water taxi over to Paradise Island, and started walking down the far end of beach, as far away from the gigantic Atlantis Resort area as I could get. I wanted to be all alone and away from people. I prayed and asked God to help me find a good spot for us to meet. Deep inside of me, I had a strong hope and expectation that God really was going to speak to me and give me clear guidance, but as I walked farther down that white sandy beach, the awkwardness of what I was doing also started to settle in. There were also flaming arrows of doubt. I remember thinking once, *“What if I came all this way, spent money we couldn’t really afford, and then I don’t hear from God and come home empty handed...Jennifer will be so angry with me and I will pay heavily.”* Nevertheless, with camera, notepad, water and snacks in hand, I just kept walking in faith.

*Hebrews 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that **he rewards those who earnestly seek him.***

Finally, I came to a perfect spot where there was no one, and it even had some shade while still being on the beach. I dug out a perfectly shaped seat for myself in the pure, sugar like sand dunes. I sat down comfortably with my pen and paper on my lap. Then, I looked out at that gorgeous crystal blue water, took a few relaxing breathes, and asked God to please help me to hear from Him.

For some blessed reason, I was led to write most of my prayers and questions out to God, on paper, rather than just speaking them out. I found this to be such a wonderful thing, especially at that season of my life. It caused me to really slow my thinking down and to meditate on what I was saying.

Over the three days of sitting on that beach, for several hours at a time, I slowly wrote many thoughts and questions to God. I still have those original pages to this day, and they are very dear to me. It is so encouraging to look back almost 13 years later and see the first time I really poured out my heart to God in a crisis, expecting Him to speak clearly to me.

The following are two parts of my journal that I think best encapsulate what God wanted to say to me and to teach me on this trip.

December 14th 2004 - “Father, I have come here today to hear from you about my life and how it fits into your mission. I have made many mistakes over the last couple of years of my life. I am amazed however with what you’ve done in my heart and the changes you’ve made in me. In my spirit I feel like I’m winning in the battle against my flesh, in my struggle with pride and my need for significance. Deep in my heart Lord I feel like you are setting me apart from some special work. Let me pause here.

I had no idea what it was, but since I was about five years old, I have had this deep sense that I was *set apart* for something special. My childhood tragedies certainly contradicted that notion, but the feeling never went away.

Let me make another point while I’m on this subject. Those of us who are set apart to serve the Lord in some specific or full-time way tend to be viewed as special, more loved, or better than lay people. That is simply not true. I don’t believe for one second that my calling makes me better, or more loved than others, any more than I believe people who have bigger callings than me, are better or more loved than I am. God is not a God of favoritism, even though He can surely make you feel like His favorite sometimes.

The fact that God seems to have placed this “knowing” in me from a very early age edifies God’s election, not my merits, and it also helps me keep a sober and humble estimation of myself. What could I have possibly done as a five-year old, to be worthy of being set apart for a special work? Nothing. That clearly

shows me, that this isn't a matter of my desire, my efforts, or my merits, but rather God's mercy and His sovereign election. All of us start out as dirt bags, even his full-time workers. The fact that God cleans up one dirt bag and then sends that dirt bag to be used in the cleaning up of other dirt bags, doesn't make the first dirt bag better than the others. Plus, isn't it true that God calls some workers into special missions, not primarily because of His love for the worker, but because of His love for those the worker is to serve? For God so loved *who*, that he gave His one and only Son?

Isaiah 49:5-6 And now the LORD says— he who formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself,

Jeremiah 1:4-5 The word of the LORD came to me, saying, (5) "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."

Galatians 1:15 God, set me [Paul] apart from birth and called me by his grace.

1 Peter 1:20 He [Jesus] was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.

Continuing with the journal entry, I write. *"I dream of the day I can share my life and lessons with your church, or do whatever big thing you call me to do."* Let me stop here and praise God. My friend, this dream which God gave me, has indeed already come true in even bigger ways than I had originally imagined while writing those words. Read those words again, and then look at this ministry thirteen years later. Am I not doing exactly what I dreamed? How incredible and faithful is our God!

Psalms 37:4 Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.

I continue writing. *"In the meantime, Lord, I'm unsure about my business life. I've experienced so much turmoil and such a lack of integrity in my employers, that I just about don't want to work for anybody else. Father, do you even care about what I do for a living? Does my vocation mean anything to you? Father, why am I struggling so much with finding something steady and prosperous? Why haven't I found someone godly to work with?"*

I wish to point out that I was writing very slowly. I would write a sentence or question, and then just pause, reflect, and wait. Again, this was all completely unnatural to me and not easy. After asking that last question about why I haven't found someone godly to work with, I received my first impression that God was speaking to me. Let me continue with the journal entry and you will see...

"Lord, I feel like I just heard you say to my spirit, "because I can do it on my own." Is that right? Lord, is it really ok for me to go for it? (Again, long moments of pause) I'm not hearing your confirmation very well, but right now I just had the Proverb come into my mind, "Man makes his plans, but the Lord directs his footsteps".

There was an unwritten and unspoken understanding in my heart that the Lord was giving me permission to start my own business, and that I didn't need anyone else as an employer or partner, just He and I. After more waiting and reflecting, I wrote these next words, *"Lord, at this point I'm going to go for it. I'm going to make my plans and I'll count on you to direct my steps. I'll move forward in freedom until I hear differently from you. I will work at whatever I do, as unto the Lord. I will be diligent in my work and my focus will be on steady plodding. Lord, Jennifer and I both need some stability in my career for a while. Will you give me that? I promise to quit speculating and to focus on the work and not the money."*

As the story moves forward you will see the life changing direction that ultimately came from these few words. I said many more things to the Lord and wrote many words of thanksgiving to Him. However, I

didn't hear from Him nearly as much as I had expected, and there was a big lesson in that, which He wanted me to learn as well. This becomes clear in my next journal entry from my last day there.

Wednesday December 15th, 2004. *"Today is my last day here in the Bahamas. I came here thinking I had to figure out my whole life in three days. I have since discovered that is not the case. I believe the Lord simply wanted to impress upon me the importance of taking regular quality time to seek His face and learning how to position myself to hear from him. I have also had the impression that the Bible needs to remain the foundation of my learning, while the books of men are simply a supplement to the Word. I feel I'm supposed to really dig deep into God's word."*

A few minutes later I was led to the following two Scriptures.

Psalm 46:10 - Be still and know that I am God.

Psalm 62:5 - Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him.

Journaling continues...

"Again, I believe the Lord has just pressed upon my heart a valuable word. I came to the Bahamas expecting to hear some big and profound things from the Lord. I have had a wonderful time seeking His face, and I've definitely made some progress. However, I feel like the Lord is telling me that the islands or some distant land is not the only place I can hear his voice. I could just as easily hear from God, while being quiet at home somewhere. I'm sure if the Lord would have spoken volumes to me here, I would have started believing it had to do with the islands and my getting away. I'm quite sure the Lord doesn't want me going to the islands every time he needs to speak to me. I now see it's not about the position or location of my body, but rather the position of my heart."

In the beginning, God indeed stole me away to the islands to get me all alone and out of my noise and busy routine, but I don't have to do that today. I do still enjoy going to the woods to be alone and pray, but I have his presence and His speaking voice everywhere I go now. Ironically, I probably don't hear God speaking to me in the woods, as much as I do in my regular routine. When I go to the woods, I'm really going so I can speak to Him. That's how I best connect to Him, by expressing myself in words and sharing my heart. He seems to let me do most of the talking because He loves us pouring out our heart to Him. Then, He will usually begin speaking to me throughout the day. It's quite extraordinary and doesn't follow the prayer system that many preachers teach, where they teach you to shut up and let God do all the talking.

I'm not able to find that teaching in the Bible anywhere. Yes, Jesus taught that we shouldn't think we will be heard for our many words, but clearly, he is talking about those mindless repetitive prayers which millions of religious people around the world clog his ears with. On the contrary I see Hannah pouring out her heart in 1 Samuel, David pouring out many, many words in the Psalms, and I see the verses that say I too should pour out my heart to him and cast all of my anxieties on him for he cares for me. My prayer life with God is probably the most irreligious unchurched thing anyone has ever seen, and yet, just look at the results I'm getting. I have documented literally hundreds of answers to prayers throughout just the last eight years in my walk with God, many of which you will hear in this book.

I almost take it for granted that God speaks to me all the time now, and I don't often remember how hard it used to be to hear from Him. And by the way, if you haven't heard me say this already in my online messages, I wish to point out, that God speaks to me probably 90% by His written word. He simply has a unique way of pointing me to certain passages He wants me to hear and obey, or the Holy Spirit will bring them to remembrance. But even then, it is the Holy Spirit who still must give me the understanding and application of that principle or verse to my specific life situation.

Oh, my beloved brother or sister in Christ, don't give up if you are frustrated and still waiting for God's guidance. He didn't speak to me or give me the kind of daily guidance He gives me now, for all those years. God's speaking voice is a truly rare and invaluable treasure that must be searched for, hoped for, and expected in faith for a long time before you will find it. God speaks to those who fear Him and obey Him. He will let you experience a taste of that treasure from time to time, but don't stop there. There's a mountain of treasure to be found in the speaking voice of God to your heart. His speaking voice and presence are my most prized treasures on this earth. I can live without anything or anyone except those.

My friend, it does get easier if you will be patient. Spiritual maturity and strong faith in God will be the greatest blessings of your life, if you do not already have them in fullness, but it truly does take many years to attain it. It won't happen nearly as soon as you would like, and this is why so many never find it. They give up, but it will be your treasure if you persevere in Christ's words by faith and humble dependence. God will speak to you and guide you personally. He will make his plan known for your life, no matter what stage you are in, or how long you have left in your life. God can shrink time. He can do things in such a short period of time, that you and I could not accomplish in five life time's on our own. Fear Him, and He will guide you.

Psa 25:12 Who, then, is the man that fears the LORD? He will instruct him in the way chosen for him.

I left the islands and flew home feeling 10' tall and bullet proof. This was the most encouraging spiritual experience I had ever had, up to that point. However, Satan wasn't just going to allow me to start pursuing God and his will for my life like this, without any opposition. No, warfare was on its way.

Rev 12:17 Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring—those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

Within minutes of her picking me up at the airport, Jennifer had some negative news to share with me about some phone calls she received from the owner of the company I was working with. He said to her, "*Have Michael call me the second his plane lands, I need to talk to him*".

Let me backtrack a bit. A few weeks earlier, in the face of such distrust I was having with the owner, I had engaged in talks with my former employer Robert Steenbergh who was partnering with a company in South Florida to also create an online learning system. They had tried to put together a strategic alliance with the company in Vegas that I was selling for, but it went south and then they were interested in me coming to work for them.

One of my hottest prospects at the time was a large home improvement company out of Atlanta, GA with about twenty locations that they were interested in purchasing the training system for. The company in S. Florida offered me a onetime 50% commission split if I brought that client on board with them. My commission would have been over \$100k on that deal alone. I made a few trips to S. Florida to consult with them and was just about to come on board. That is until the partner treated me with such disrespect one day that I realized, "*Wow, if this guy is already treating me like this before I have given him the account, how will he treat me afterwards.*"

I needed that money so badly, but I was no longer willing to compromise my values and my freedom for the money. I remember when something like this happened when we were in John Freehling's office, the founder of the Lord's Gym, and I just ignored it and kept going. I suffered so much for my lack of wisdom. This time, I was able to take that lesson and apply it here. I knew that a tree was recognized by its fruit and that this guy's tree was rotten.

Shortly after that, I called Robert Steenbergh and told him how sorry I was, but that I could not work with his partner, and that I was not going to sign a deal with them. He was anxious to find some way to keep me from leaving, but I was resolved. It was hard for us both because we really liked and had a lot of respect for one another, but unfortunately, he wasn't going to be involved with the day to day running of this company. From this additional story, you can see why I wrote these words on the beach, *"Lord, I'm unsure about my business life. I've experienced so much turmoil and such a lack of integrity in my employers, that I just about don't want to work for anybody else."*

I knew the owner of the company in Vegas was suspicious of my talks with the company in S. Florida, and I assumed that's what all of this "have Mike call me the second his plane lands" stuff was all about. Additionally, Jennifer had a very stressful day and she was wearing it when she picked me up.

The devil hadn't waited even one hour before trying to barrage me with fiery arrows and unwind and reverse three days of sanctuary, peace, and clarity with God. The timing was so obvious that I immediately recognized it as spiritual attack, but it still took a huge toll on how I was feeling. *"Oh, how I thank you God for striking me with so many blows from the enemy and allowing him to attack me, to teach my stubborn heart to be humble and to trust in You, rather than in myself. You were so persistent with me Father and never pushed me beyond your grasp, even when I didn't understand your good purposes for all of it!"*

When Jennifer shared some of the dialogue, she had with the company owner, I could feel Satan's darts piercing my heart. I was so upset by the timing of the strike that I started having extremely negative thoughts, thoughts of just quitting and thoughts of really putting someone in their place that day. The devil's goal is always to get us to react to painful or negative news, apart from waiting on God's counsel or help. Because I am a feeler this makes me even more vulnerable to these kinds of attacks. If the devil can get us to react and take some extreme action out of our emotions, rather than by God's will and timing, he effectively removes us from the path God intends for us, which in turn robs God of his glory. I believe Satan's goal isn't just to ruin our lives, but rather to rob God of His well-deserved love and glory in our lives. Therefore we have to learn to stand patiently in the days of evil and not react to the provocations. Standing patiently will cause great suffering in us but will always end with God being glorified.

Even as I write these words, I was blindsided by one of these types of attacks just yesterday. This particular attack really frustrates me, not only because it keeps happening, but because the devil keeps twisting my words and motives, in the mind of the believer that I'm lovingly and patiently trying to help. My attempts to accommodate their areas of weakness, keep being interpreted as if I'm looking down on them. The person has such strong sensitivities in this area, that almost no matter what I say, it is always interpreted incorrectly, and I can't do anything to convince them otherwise. It's like trying to feed a wounded dog at the shelter that interprets even your sweetest of approaches as a threat because that's all they've ever known. That takes tremendous patience.

It's so painful for me to have my good motives falsely accused over and over as being evil, by this person, that yesterday I blew up over it and just wanted to get them out of my life immediately. This is in spite of the fact that Father has told me to be patient and to allow myself to be falsely accused by them.

For me, it's like touching a hot fire. It's so painful that I cannot endure it on my own. I would much rather have the instant relief of having this person out of my life, but I know that if I quit, I will miss the opportunity to bear this cross and to become more like Jesus through death in this area. I also may hinder the work Father is doing in them. I want to do God's will more than I want the pain relief, so I must cry out to Abba to give me the grace to patiently endure the suffering.

The attack that happened within just minutes of my plane landing from the Bahamas had me feeling the same way. However, by God's grace, I decided I would not call the owner that night but would wait until the morning after I had a chance to unwind.

I put it out of mind as much as I could. I went to sleep and woke up in the middle of the night having had a terrible dream. I dreamed that I had been visiting a good friend of mine who owns his own company. My friend was the only person I recognized in the dream, and even his place of business and the location was different from real life. I completed my visit with him and on my way out, it was dark outside. I was walking toward my car when suddenly, I saw the largest snake that I have ever seen in my life jump out and very quickly slither under a big truck. This snake must have been about 8" wide and 20' long. It moved with incredible speed. It immediately started coming after me, and I ran for my life. I ran about 10 feet and climbed over a 5' to 6' fence, hoping to get away. This thing was right on my tail, and as soon as I jumped the fence it was slithering its whole body over the little fence. While it was coming on my side of the fence, I decided to jump back across the other way and just run as fast as I could. The snake was too quick for me and he bit my right foot. It was a huge bite, and I lost a good bit of flesh right on the top of my foot. I also got bit somewhere on my arm and I had blood all over me. I was screaming for help and then the snake let me go and slithered away towards a side walk. The sidewalk had a broken section and the corner of the side walk was lifted off the ground and there was a hole in the ground about 12" wide for him to go into. He disappeared very quickly into the hole, and I ran back inside my friend's business asking for help. The weird thing was that someone else was having a problem that was taking precedence over mine. I don't know what the problem was, but people were practically ignoring me. It was like they just didn't get it, and I was saying....my God people look at my foot. Look at my foot! Look at what this thing did to my foot and my arm. Aren't you guys afraid? Don't you want to do something about this? I think I was almost as disturbed by the fact that no one recognized the threat, as much as I was the snake itself. My friend was the only one who recognized that I was seriously in trouble, but before he can make it over to help me, I woke up.

In that dream, God was helping me to start making the connection between the things that were going on in the natural part of my life, with the warfare happening in the spiritual realm. It would still be several years before I would become more conscious of the regular reality of spiritual warfare. I was still very much in the mindset that there were natural and psychological explanations for all the things going on in my life and relationships.

I woke up the next morning thinking about some of the negative stuff that Jennifer had shared the night before. I walked straight into my office and read Colossians 3, which I had been challenged to do every day by a neighbor friend who was a pastor. I wasn't 3 verses into it before I started feeling a supernatural calming in my spirit. There is power in the word of God and as I read the whole thing, I felt my heart and attitude change. I made that hard phone call and it turned out to be no problem at all. We got things taken care of, and my attitude with him was very calm and cooperative as we settled the matter peacefully.

I had felt God had given me the greenlight in the Bahamas to move forward on planning my own business, but I was still very gun shy from the gym failure. However, there were several circumstances that I believed I could see God's hand in, that served as confirmations for me to move forward. That fact that the partner in South Florida exploded in rudeness, just before I was going to sign with them, the fact that Jennifer also felt we should do this in faith, in spite of standing against almost everything else I had done, and the obvious spiritual attacks against it, all gave me confidence that this is the direction that God wanted me to move in.

Now it was time to start the entrepreneurial journey all over again, but this time I had the confidence that I was doing so within God's will, not mine.

Chapter 11

A Time for Testing

After months of searching for an affordable software developer for my online training system, I found one and signed a contract with them in February of 2005. They even offered us flexible payment terms and my plan was to earn enough money by conducting live sales training programs, until the project was completed.

With only \$7k in our checking account, and with no guarantee that we would receive any more income from my work for the company in Vegas, I wrote the first deposit check, on February 11th 2005 for \$6500 to get the project started.

Ten days later, I receive a legal letter and a request for summary judgment against us in the amount of \$75,346.13 by one of the finance companies we leased our gym equipment through. Although I eventually got all the equipment back from L.A. Fitness, and even though I paid to move it and store it for 6 months until they found a buyer, they still came at us for the judgment. I had the desire to make good on these debts, but I simply could not recover from this kind of loss. My conscience remained clear, first because the debt was a result of someone stealing my business from me, but even more so because I was able to give the company all their equipment back to resell, even after I had paid thousands in deposits and monthly payments while we had it.

I kept moving forward with my new online business startup which we named Revelation ITS (Interactive Training System), while at the same time I was still selling for the company in Vegas and maintaining my accounts. Again, my conscience was clear because he never would honor me with an agent contract, and I had no non-compete agreement either.

I kept moving forward in the confidence that I was doing God's will. Now, it was time for Him to put some weight on the bar and test me to see if I would stay on course with His will, even in the face of what looked like a lucrative opportunity that was about to pop up.

When I was in my early twenties there was a very wealthy man who lived the truly lavish lifestyle that I had wanted. I met him a few times and had always longed to be able to be around him, in hopes that his ability to earn wealth would somehow rub off on me. That door never opened while I was younger, but now that God was ready to test me, that door was about to swing wide open.

As I was launching my live speaking and sales training services in early 2005, I sent out an email to friends and family to let everyone know what I was now doing, while I waited for my online training system to be built. Soon, I received an email from that very man whom I had dreamed of being able to be around, Brig Hart. Brig is considered the most successful network marketer in the world, and he was now working with a company called Monavie.

I had known of Brig for many years. He and his wife Lita are best friends with the parents of one of my best friends from high school in Cocoa Beach, FL, so I had met him several times since I was in high school. He got his start with Amway and is considered the top network marketing leader in the world. He had earned nearly a hundred million dollars through his Amway business and by selling books and tapes to his worldwide downline.

When I first met Brig, I found him to be an unbelievably charismatic, positive, and likeable guy. He was like a grown-up version of me, but on steroids and with lots of money. He knows how to make people feel special like few others could, and I do believe he is sincere as far as I was always able to tell.

So, here was the first rich guy I got to know who lived a lavish lifestyle and talked about Jesus all the time, and since I too loved God and money from an early age, I had been really drawn to Brig in my early twenties. He set an example for me that made me feel like it was ok to love God and money. I remember going to a small meeting with him where he had on a diamond watch that was worth over \$200,000. He took it off and let me hold it, and I remember feeling such covetousness and lust in my heart for that kind of wealth. I believe there is a spirit behind mammon, that exploits the already high human lust for it. I think that's why wealth can be so intoxicating and why people will even murder someone for it. Just last year I heard from two grandparents who lost their daughter to a husband who was now suspected of poisoning her for her life insurance money. There seems to be an invisible power behind mammon, a dark power. I think this is part of the reason why the Bible says the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and I see how God uses it to be the greatest tester of men's hearts, especially Christians.

I only saw Brig occasionally after high school, but he first connected with me in a significant way after I launched the Lord's Gym. He was starting a new networking marketing company called "Ultimate Success" and was trying to bring making money and spirituality all into one. I allowed him to come and do one of his first meetings at our gym. He drove down in an RV and parked overnight in our gym parking lot. Going inside his luxury RV stirred up those old covetous desires for material prosperity again.

Brig was impressed with the idea of the Lord's Gym, and I remember hoping he might want to invest and help bail me out of the mess I was in. Fortunately, he wasn't interested in investing in the gym and soon thereafter, he pulled the plug on his "Ultimate Success" MLM because it never gained traction. After that, I lost touch with him for several years, but occasionally received updates through my best friend from high school.

When I sent that email out to friends and family in early 2005 letting them know I had started my own sales training and speaking company, Brig contacted me again. He had joined a new networking marketing company called Monavie, which was built around the distribution of bottles of Acai berry juice. He told me it was going to be a huge success and that he wanted to talk to me about providing his distributors with my sales and people skills training. I was excited about having another client with ongoing income potential, while I was building my online training system.

He wanted me to do a presentation for all the executives and top distributors from multiple countries to see if my training was a fit for Monavie. I was not scheduled to speak until the afternoon, but I attended the entire function to learn as much as I could about the company. At lunch, I noticed that all the important people were all sitting with each other at a huge table. They had saved a spot for me, but as I was walking towards it, I saw a lady sitting all by herself with no one to eat with her. I decided to join her and asked about why she was there. For the next 30 minutes or more, I listened to this lady describe nothing less than a destructive addiction to network marketing. Monavie was her seventh network marketing company, and at one point she said with such desperation, "*Michael, this one has to be the one for me...my ship has to come in with Monavie...I have lost everything, even my family, and I have nothing left if this doesn't work out.*" She had run off all her friends and family because of her addiction to network marketing. To me, she didn't seem much better off than a heroin addict.

I walked away from my lunch feeling conflicted and almost dirty, thinking to myself, "*Am I, as a Christian, going to be helping people like that stay in something like this?*" I already didn't like network marketing, and didn't believe it was a godly business, as evidenced by my unwillingness to be a part of the network.

And yet, I was more than willing and excited to be paid to teach people how to sell so *they* could do it. This lunch encounter created a small seed of internal conflict with my conscience, but it wasn't going to sting for long because of what was about to happen.

To show you just how pathetically weak and insecure my character was, and how enticed I still was by money, I will share an email that I wrote on February 28th 2005 to a client who asked how my talk went with Monavie.

Hey Doug,

Thanks for asking how my speech went. (I'm copying this to update a few of my friends as well) You wouldn't believe me if I told you!! It was incredible! I was the second to the last speaker at the end of the day on Saturday. It was 3:45 pm when I got started and I only had 30 minutes in which to prove to the audience that they were all in "sales" whether they believed it or not, and then get them to understand and hunger for the skills they needed to be more successful with people and in business. With God's favor, I was able to pull it off. You should have seen it, I caught them all off guard with a series of good questions and then I threw them into an exercise where I made them all stand up and pair up with someone they didn't know. I then told them that they had 90 seconds to sell the other person a bottle of Monavie as best as they knew how. Everyone participated, and it proved to be an enlightening experience to them all. Needless to say, the second they all sat down, there were very interested in hearing what I had to say. When the convention ended, I had people coming up front standing around me for almost 30 minutes like I was a celebrity or something and wanting to speak with me, each one with an amazing compliment and each one hungry to find out if I had written any books or recorded any programs where they could get more of the information. It was like I was dreaming or something. Two doctors from West Palm Beach, FL came up to me and asked if I'd ever be interested in coming down there to help a bunch of doctors that are hopeless on their selling and people skills. It was unreal. I was so humbled to hear what people were saying and I was so excited to see how eager they were to learn more. I found out that many networking companies are good about teaching people about the product and about the compensation plan, but don't offer many resources on basic selling and people skills. The people were so hungry for it. I was doing this engagement for free so they could see if I was a fit for their organization. They invited me to dinner with the CEO Dallin Larsen, a few of the doctors and my friend Brig Hart, the legendary networker. They gave me compliment after compliment and before dinner was over, they scrounged up \$300 in cash from a few of the people sitting next to the CEO and they put it in an envelope and gave it me as little honorarium and token for their appreciation. It was so funny! I thought that was very nice, after I had agreed to speak for free.

Anyway, the best news came yesterday, the day after the event. I got a call from my friend Brig and he told me that I had been officially invited to speak at the National Convention in Salt Lake City in June. Better yet, the CEO, the doctors and the directors have also decided to "brand me" to the company and make me the official motivational/sales trainer for the whole Monavie company. UNBELIEVABLE! somebody pinch me over here. Could this really be happening to Mike "I got my face kicked in Chriswell?"

Brig called me up and said "*Mike, I know what your dreams are because you told me, and they have just been realized*". He and I are going to be meeting frequently over the next 2 weeks to discuss a training strategy rollout and create some products like "CD's Tapes, virtual training etc. My training is going to be made available to the entire Monavie organization, which has just launched in 5 countries. I'm absolutely thrilled to death and can't imagine what might come out of this. This is exactly how my hero, Zig got started in his career, with Mary Kay and my buddy Brig use to book Zig all the time for his conventions. Talk about being in the right place at the right time!

At that time, I was still blinded to my insecurities and my ever present need to prove to others that I was not my last failure. I was still very susceptible in the flesh to the temptations which came through the accolades of men. They praised me for the very things God was going to one day show me were detestable to Him. I still couldn't see how God viewed sales training and motivational speaking as a false religion of

self. I even thought He was pleased with my performance and that He was giving me favor simply because men praised my talents so much. These things are so humiliating to look back on and read, and yet they not only continue to show me the depths of God's compassion and patience to those who love him, but more importantly His ability to transform a human heart.

Sadly, I don't remember having any lasting concerns about the lady I had lunch with, after my meeting went so well and I received such praise. This shows the war between the Spirit and the flesh and how easy it is to be enticed by money and the praise of men, away from our Christian values and how quickly we can begin to justify ourselves. This is so very deceptive and dangerous.

Not too long after that meeting, Brig invited me to come stay at his home for a few days near Jacksonville, FL so we could plan things out. Once I was there, he told me he had been praying and knew God had blessed him with this opportunity which was going to explode. He told me he reserved a position high up in his network for me that would practically guarantee that I'd be a millionaire. In addition to that, he said, he wanted to make me his next Zig Ziglar at the conventions.

In spite of all the enticement, and my desire for some good money, I still wasn't giving in to being in the network and something else happened in my spirit when I was at his house. Hearing and seeing all the stories of his past wealth and seeing how excited he was about making all this new money in Monavie and hearing what all he was going to do with it, actually started to put a fear in me. It sobered me up. Instead of making me want it more, I started feeling like I was in danger, even perhaps standing on the very edge of losing my purpose in God.

Brig had all the right words and passion and he believed God was blessing him with all this material wealth. I had been very tempted, but he could tell that I was starting to feel some pushback against his belief in the prosperity gospel. He spoke of helping more people come to Christ, and of course all the orphans that were being helped in South America through this great company. In other words, he felt this justified the whole thing and made it God approved. But, no matter how much he talked about Jesus and the orphans, I was no longer able to reconcile the true Spirit of Christ with this much desire and pursuit of worldly wealth.

I felt strong temptations to just cave in and please him, and because I needed a lot of money, but I stuck to my guns and politely told him that I was 100% done with network marketing. He said I'd be walking away from a once in a lifetime opportunity and that many, many people would give anything to have the network position he was offering to me. He honestly couldn't believe I was saying no.

Luke 12:15 Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

It is a good thing to help the poor, and I can't judge a man's hidden motives, but I can judge a tree by its love of money, and to me all the Jesus talk and the orphan donations seemed like a cover up for the real motive, money. I think the little poor children they are helping and posting on their websites are there to ease everyone's consciences, including mine, or to simply to keep people from saying what they already know in their heart is true, *"it's all just about money"*. I can tell you for a fact that all the children we had adopted through World Vision, when we owned the gym, often quieted my conscience when it tried to tell me that this was all just about making money.

Never mind the fact that Jesus said in Matthew 6:4, to let your giving be done in secret and not to be seen by men on your websites, brochures, or in my case the gym walls.

The fact is, this technique works too well for these MLM's, not to use it. Just as a person's conscience is starting to speak up, here comes the pictures of the little black children in Africa getting clean water to

drink, as a result of this money loving Pyramid scheme. Those pictures shut the voice of conscience right up. I think if we want to see what a godly man's motive and lifestyle looks like when he truly loves Jesus, and truly wants to help Orphans, we can read the autobiography of George Muller and see a totally opposite example. According to my Biblical understanding today, no amount of generosity will justify before God, the love of money in man's heart. Even Judas Iscariot spoke about and gave money to the poor (John 13:29).

Luke 16:14-15 The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. (15) He said to them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight.

I cared about Brig's soul and was concerned after seeing up close and personal this strong love of money. The next morning, he and I were both on his porch reading our Bibles, and I felt this strong desire and courage to confront him about his relationship to money. I said something to the effect of, "Brig, have you ever wondered if God is jealous of the money, and have you ever wondered when enough is enough."

Although I can't remember his exact words, he was very calm and relaxed in his response. But my question was the straw that broke the camel's back in our relationship. He had already booked me to speak at an upcoming Monavie convention at the World Golf Village in Ponte Vedra, FL, but that morning on his porch, Brig Hart wrote off Michael Chriswell as a team player. He now knew I was only going to get in the way of his prosperity gospel.

1 Timothy 6:5-10 [they are] men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain. (6) But godliness with contentment is great gain. (7) For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. (8) But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. (9) People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. (10) For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

I know God allowed this division to happen after he tested my heart, by exposing me to this kind of wealth and opportunity. Then, once He saw that I made the right choice in my heart, he made a way out for me, so I wouldn't have to repeatedly struggle with this temptation anymore.

1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

A few months later after I fulfilled that speaking engagement for them, and Brig and I were no longer keeping in close touch, I was having lunch at a restaurant in Orlando, when I overheard someone talking about these audio cd's by a guy named Michael Chriswell with Monavie. I went over and introduced myself and found out that Brig's partner website was selling them. I contacted Brig and he said he would cut me a check once he calculated how many had been sold. To my knowledge, I never received a check, but I don't hold that against Brig. I'm sure he was so busy and that it was simply an oversight, or perhaps it might have been an insignificant amount of money.

In the end, as nice of a charismatic personality as he is, I believe Brig Hart is the ultimate poster child for one of the counterfeit gospels called the "prosperity gospel". I believe that he is missing out on the true spiritual riches in Christ and is trading them for material riches that won't last beyond the grave. However,

Brig might just as easily believe that I am the poster child for the “poverty gospel”, and that I’m the one missing out on all of God’s blessings in the here and now.

After all, Brig was right in predicting that Monavie was going to explode in revenues. In just a few years he quickly took the company to over a billion in annual revenue and he himself made untold millions. I’m confident that just as he said, I too would have made a few million. As for me, I made the choice and took my stand for spiritual treasures, not temporal treasure. With God’s help in those days, I proved to myself that I had a new level of character, and that money’s grip on me had been loosened. To me, there is no wealth in the world that can replace that feeling. As Thomas a Kempis so rightly said, *“The richest man in the world is not the man who has the most, but rather the man who needs the least.”*

Rev 3:17-18 You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. (18) I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

This part of my story reminds us that not all doors which God allows to be opened, are meant to be walked into. God will often intentionally allow doors to relationships, education, careers, business, money, church, ministry, support, and other desirable opportunities to be opened, in order to test us to see if we will simply grab what we want, or if we will stay the course and wait for His counsel. This was one of those exact tests for me, one of many to come, and you would not be reading this book, had I not passed.

There’s a scary story in 1 Kings 13 that reminds me of the story I just shared with you. Through a young man of God, God spoke a cursing against the altar which King Jeroboam was standing near. When Jeroboam got angry at the prophet’s word from the Lord, he reached out to seize him, but his hand shriveled up. The King repented and asked the prophet to pray to God for him. He did, and the King’s hand was restored. Then the king invited him to come to his palace to receive dinner a gift. The young prophet declined because the Lord told him specifically to stay on the path and not to turn back from it. He obeyed the Lord and stayed on the path.

Then, an older prophet came and found the young prophet and asked him to come and eat with him, but the young prophet again said no. This time, the older prophet explained that he too was a man of God, and that an angel told him that it was ok for the young man to come with him. The young prophet then agreed and went with him. While eating their delicious meal, the older prophet receives another word and tells the young man he has disobeyed God. Shortly after leaving the older prophet’s house, the young man of God was killed by a lion.

Chapter 12

“No Daddy, I can do it all by myself.”

Now that the door with Brig and Monavie had closed, I put all my focus back on getting this new online training business started up. I was still striving hard to earn enough money to pay for the development of the software, so I could do less travel and stay home to help raise our two young children, Tyler and Chelsea.

One of the most touching memories I have, happened in September of 2003, when Tyler was just two years old. I had been on the road and away from him for about a whole month. I was promoting a Tom Hopkins

seminar in Norfolk, VA and Jennifer and Tyler flew in for the seminar and to spend some time with me in Virginia Beach before we left that city.

As Jennifer was coming from the gate at the airport, I could see Tyler in the stroller from very far away and I was so excited, but he hadn't seen me yet. As they came closer, she was trying to point to me and tell Tyler where I was. Finally, he saw me, and when his eyes met with mine the most heart touching, thing happened. I expected him to have a happy little two-year-old smile and giggle when he saw me. Instead, he went into what looked like a panic attack. He started crying and shaking, throwing his arms and clenching his fists, jumping up and down to get out of that stroller, yelling, "Daddy...daddy...daddy." I have never felt greater honor at any time in my life than when I saw my son's desperate longing to get to me. It's one of my all-time favorite memories in his life. It touched me so deeply and at the same time broke my heart because he hadn't seen me in so long. I knew that day, I needed to find a way to get off the road, and that memory had been a great motivation to launch my online training business.

During the early development stage of the software, that large home improvement client in Atlanta, GA, which had tried to hire me as their full-time sales trainer, agreed to be my first online training client. They were so excited about the idea that they agreed to start paying me to write and produce a custom training program specific to their product and exclusively for their 20 office locations, while we all waited for the technology to be finished. This was a huge blessing to me and it gave me the income I needed to keep paying for the development.

Having sent out that email in February, to all my friends and family about my new speaking and training business, I received an email and spiritual challenge from my friend Matthew Eldridge on March 15th, 2005. Matt was the one who first told me about Jesus Christ in the 10th grade, and I was riding in his car when I stepped out onto a Bible tract that asked me if I died in a car accident today, would I go to heaven or hell. Soon after, I became a believer in Jesus Christ and Matt and I became good friends and have kept in touch, albeit infrequently, over all these years.

In his email, he wrote, *"Just imagine if you took that amazing incredible God-given speaking gift of yours and stopped speaking of earthly things like time management, goal setting, attitude excellence, sales training, etc. and instead you TOTALLY surrendered that gift, that tongue, under the Lord's submission and said, "God, I'm tired of talking about things that are helping people in the natural, and I'm tired of doing it for me. I want to use this talent to draw people into your kingdom, I want to draw people into your presence, I want to draw people into deeper intimacy with you! I want to be sold out to you, Lord, whatever that means. I'm using my gift to enhance the quality of physical living, but LORD, I want to use it to enhance the quality of spiritual life and make an eternal difference!!!! I want to be sold out for you, Lord!!! I want to store up amazing treasures in the kingdom of heaven...treasures that come by my obedience and full submission, trusting in you, using this talent, this gift, to preach your word, to evangelize and spread your gospel, where ever you take me!"*

I did not immediately dismiss this email because back in around 1999, Matt had a dream about what God was going to one day do in my life. He said it was so incredible that I wouldn't believe it, even if he told me. He never told me the dream because he also felt God was showing him that I wasn't ready to hear it yet, but he wanted me to be encouraged by the idea. This happened even before I had the encounter with the angel in the church that morning in 2002, who told me that God would be magnified and glorified through my obedience. To this day, Matt never told me what it was he saw, but even if he had told me he saw exactly what God is doing in my life today, I don't think I would have believed him.

I'd love to tell you that his email in 2005 was the email that changed my direction, and that Matt was my spiritual hero twice, but I cannot say that. Instead, I emailed him back to let him know that I appreciated his concern and love for me, but that he was missing some insight into my life since he hadn't been in my

life much in the last two years. I explained to him that my “spiritual advisors” had all agreed that I was to be a workplace “evangelist” and I had no desire to be in full time ministry. Let this be a reminder that “spiritual advisors” can be well meaning, but also be, well, very wrong.

I wrote back to Matt, *“I am striving to keep myself positioned so that I can hear from the Lord. Right now, he is really bringing things together for me, because he finally got me to put down the “money god”. I no longer love or serve money at all and God knows my heart. I am only anxious about paying off the \$300k in gym debt, but I am still trusting in the Lord for his way of doing it.”*

I mentioned to him that there was a great movement towards marketplace ministry and that I believed I had the same call as Zig Ziglar, who had just been featured on New Man magazine as the “Billy Graham” of the business world. This is a good place to point out that not only were my spiritual advisors wrong, but so was I. So many people had mentioned Zig Ziglar’s name when talking about my sales and speaking abilities, that when combined with the fact that he was my hero, I became convinced that his path was to be my path.

Zig and I both had several things in common which really drove that conviction deep. Not only were we both Christians, but we both got started in door-to-door sales, and we both broke records as the top producer in several sales jobs. We both had periods in our life where we went through a number of terrible career “deals” in a very short period. And, most strikingly, we had both worked for a professional speaker who we looked up to as God-fearing man, but who turned out to live a terribly hypocritical double life. We were both devastated and lost the trust we had in our own judgments of people. To me, these similarities always had much greater meaning than just coincidence.

I also discovered that Zig and his wife Jean struggled terribly for the first twenties years of their marriage with his career failures and many finance struggles. This was also my experience. However, the one major thing that Zig and I did not have in common were the kind of wives we had. Zig said that Jean, affectionately known as “the red head” was always supportive of him through all the ups and downs. Many times, when he was discouraged and wanted to give up, she would tell him that she believed in him and knew that one day he would be successful. I remember when I first heard that, I was so sad in my heart and felt a deep mourning over the fact that I did not have that. I couldn’t even imagine having that. Where Zig received love and patient support from his wife, I received ridicule, contempt, and condemnation.

Nevertheless, at the time, I was still convinced that God was going to use me in business like Zig. There was no way I could ever see myself in a full-time vocational ministry, and I dreamed of having Zig mentor me one day. Looking back, Matthew’s words in 2005 seem nothing short of prophetic, but it was going to be seven years before God called me in that direction and gave me a ministry.

Going forward, especially in my remarriage story to Persis, you will be amazed at how many times God does things in sevens. It is clearly His favorite number in the Bible and it represents completion or perfection, unlike the number 6, which falls one short of perfection. I was amazed to see one day in my personal Bible study through Genesis, that God made man on the 6th day, man was the 6th thing he created (not including separating water in the atmospheres and on earth from each other), and the man was commanded to work 6 days. The number of man truly is 666, right from the beginning of creation, just like the Bible says in Revelation 13:18, but I digress.

I feel certain that it was God’s will, to let me continue to strive to achieve, on my own, what I then believed would be a godly and successful life that would please him. Father knew that in my heart, I still had much strength in myself that I needed to lose, and much wisdom through suffering that I still needed to learn. He was still giving me a chance to see for myself what kind of a godly life I could build on my own, much like

the prodigal son whose Father gives him his inheritance and effectively says, “*here you go...now go see what you can do with this on your own.*”

Few things have been more encouraging to me on my spiritual journey, than to discover similarities between God’s dealings with me, and his dealings with his servants in the Bible. I can see similarities in many of their stories, but in this season of my story, I am able to best identify with the story of Jacob which begins in the 25th chapter of the book of Genesis.

Although Jacob was God’s chosen servant from birth, and although he avoided the obvious evils, he was still a self-sufficient schemer and a grabber of the things that he wanted in life. For the longest time, he seems to be getting along just fine without the need of God. Even after he has the vision at Bethel and sees the angels going up and down from heaven and then sees God speaking to him, He has the audacity to say, “*If you take care of my life and give me clothes, food, and safe passage, then you will be my God.*” (Genesis 28:20-22) I cringe when I read those words as a Spirit filled follower of Christ, but Jacob gets a pass for his carnal thinking because the kingdom of God and the Holy Spirit had not yet come. He was not born again, and he did not have the newness of life, or spiritually renewed mind available under the grace of the New Covenant.

Hebrews 8:6-10 But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises. (7) For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. (8) But God found fault with the people and said: "The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. (9) It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord. (10) This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

Even though Jacob’s thinking was so carnal, we still see God speaking promises to him, guiding him, blessing him, avenging the wrongs done to him, all despite Jacob’s dreadful self-sufficiency for twenty years. Whereas Jacob had one bad employer who changed his pay plan 10 times over 20 years, I had multiple Laban’s who all used me for their own selfish interests, including one who changed my pay plan 10 times. Nevertheless, God was still with Jacob and blessed his efforts and allowed him to build a life and family for himself. But then one day, when God was ready, he broke Jacob in a way which was deep, permanent, and life changing. It brought an end to all his self-sufficiency and self-reliance, and it ushered in the needed humility for God to build something spectacular through his life, an entire nation of God’s people.

Jacob had a physical wrestling match with the Lord near the Jabbok river, which ends with Jacob’s hip being displaced and him receiving a blessing from God. Nearly everything in the Old Covenant which is physical, now represents things which are spiritual. For example, in the Old Covenant, the Promise Land was a physical place of rest and abundance for Israel, but in the New Covenant, our Promise Land and rest come through spiritual abundance in Christ Jesus. I too was going to one day have a spiritual wrestling match with God very similar to Jacob. And just like Jacob had sent his family on ahead of him so he could wrestle with God alone, I too was going to send my family away for a few days on vacation, so I could wrestle with God. It was still four years away on October 30th, 2009, because as of yet I still wasn’t ready.

In his book “The Two Covenants”, Andrew Murray wrote that one of the primary reasons for the Law of Moses and the Old Covenant was to show the Israelites their powerlessness to be righteous on their own. In that Covenant, God gave His people all the rules, the principles, and the resources they needed for being

righteous before him. Then, He let them set about to pursue it, so they could see what kind of righteousness they could produce, even with some of God's help and resources.

Deuteronomy 6:25 And if we are careful to obey all this law before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us, that will be our righteousness."

The results of their efforts are what make up most of the tragic stories we read about in the Old Testament. Absolute failure is an absolute understatement. In the end, Israel was found to be completely incapable of maintaining their righteousness and rest in God, even with all his promises, guidance, warnings, and miracles. This helplessness is what led the way for God to be able to send a new righteousness that came with his enabling power, through Christ Jesus.

Romans 3:21-22 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. (22) This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference...

How God dealt with Jacob as an individual, is the same way He dealt with Israel as a nation, and how I have found Him to deal with myself and many others I have read about in the history of the Church. God's goal from the very beginning has been to save us by His grace, through faith. However, God has made it so that His grace only comes when there is humility. Humility only comes when pride goes, and pride only goes after it has been crushed by great failures, or long periods of brokenness and discipline. Men typically have to discover through experience, their own weakness and the futility of trying to live righteously apart from an absolute total dependence on God. That is a very hard lesson for us to learn, but it's the only way we can please Him. It is by needing Him, and then holding on to him, that we overcome. When the time was right, God allowed Jacob to wrestle with Him, and Jacob became an overcomer because no matter what, he was now ready to fully depend on Him, as evidenced by the fact that he would not let go of God until God blessed him.

Genesis 32:24-28 So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. (25) When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. (26) Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." (27) The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered. (28) Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome."

Notice how it says the *man* could not overpower Jacob, so he had to touch the socket of his hip. I feel like God could say the same thing about me because I refused for so long to be overpowered. As a result, one-day God was going to have to touch the socket of my hip, so that I would walk with a spiritual limp for the rest of my life.

God is only pleased when men humble themselves to the point of becoming like needy little children, in recognition of their absolute powerlessness to live godly lives apart from Him. This is why we all have to have the Romans 7 experience, where the good we want to do, we cannot do, but the evil we do not want to do, that we keep on doing. That kind of spiritual impotence must be experienced and hated before we can move into the Romans 8 power, where the law of the Spirit of life sets us free from the law of sin and death. Therefore God planned from the very beginning to one day send Jesus Christ, to do for man what man could never do on his own, but not until man first had the chance to realize his impotence and become low in his own eyes. Many have found, that like water, God's grace always flows to the lowest places.

James 4:6 But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

Father had allowed me to try to build the gym ministry all on my own, so I could try, fail, and then recognize my own helplessness. It reminds me of when Tyler and Nathan were little, and they wanted to put together some toy, or try some activity on their own, like putting on their own motocross boots. No matter how much I tried to tell them that they were going to need my help, they kept insisting, *“No, Daddy, I can do it all by myself.”*

The only way for me to let them learn the truth of their own weakness, was to pull back and let them try and eventually fail. Soon after, there would come a humbled little child, *“Ok, Daddy, I need a little help.”* The only difference between Tyler, Nathan, and me, was that *they* realized their weakness and humbled themselves before their father, long before I did. That is why, in His infinite, patient and merciful love, God was patiently dealing with me in such a way, that one day I would no longer be like the guilty men He speaks about in Habakkuk 1:11, whose own strength is their god.

Another reason that Father was pleased to help me keep going, was to one day teach me about another kind of surrender. It was one thing to surrender to God when I had lost everything through the gym failure and was left for dead in the valley of the shadow of death. It was going to be an entirely different kind of surrender when I had one day built my life, and then be brought to a place of giving it all up for Him. It was God’s will for *me*, to achieve a level of the success that I had so long desired, because He wanted to give me the blessing of having something costly to sacrifice to Him, when the proper time would come.

2 Samuel 24:24 – “I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing.”

Malachi 1:12 – “When you bring injured, crippled or diseased animals and offer them as sacrifices, should I accept them from your hands?”

When I finally surrendered on October 30th, 2009, it was going to be a very costly surrender, and as a result, my faith in God was going to have more weight to it than I could imagine. I can now see that one of the reasons I have held on to my faith so tightly, through all these years of suffering, is because I paid so much for it in the beginning.

Hebrews 10:32-36 Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. (33) Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. (34) You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. (35) So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. (36) You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.

Father knew I had a challenging journey ahead of me, and I needed to have paid a high price for my faith in Him, in order that I wouldn’t be so quick to turn from it when the going got tough. I’m confident that history is filled with many men who got so discouraged in their search for gold or precious stones, and who wanted to quit many times, but they were unable to do so when they thought about the cost they had already paid to get that far. It seems to me that the higher a price a man has paid for something, the less likely he is willing to turn from it when adversity strikes.

Even though forgiveness of our sins in Christ is free, and it happens in a moment, following Christ and finding the fullness of His Holy Spirit will cost you everything and takes a lifetime. I’m saying this as someone who has been a Christian for thirty years in March of 2018. The more a person has given up for Christ, the less likely they are to turn from Him when times of testing and persecution come. Like when

Jesus said in Luke 7:47, that he who has been forgiven much loves much, and he who has been forgiven little, loves little, it can also be said, he who gives up much, endures much.

Who could ever imagine Paul falling away from the faith after paying the high price of his journey as outlined in 2 Corinthians 11? Who could ever imagine the man in Matthew 13 walking away from his field, after he sold everything he had to buy it? Jesus taught this very principle in Matthew 6:21, when He said, *"Where your treasure is, there will be your heart also."* When you surrender it all to Christ, you have moved your treasure and thus your heart into the kingdom of God, and it will not be easy to walk away from, even when things become very difficult.

Luke 14:33 In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.

Mar 10:28 Peter said to him, "We have left everything to follow you!"

In John chapter 6:66 (how appropriate), after Jesus has done some hard teaching, many of his disciples turned away and no longer followed him. Those disciples were admirers and hearers only, not true followers who had given up everything to follow Jesus like the twelve had. When the going got tough, the others got going. On the other hand, look at the response of Peter and the other disciples who had walked away from everything to follow Jesus, in the face of this very same difficult teaching.

John 6:67-69 "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve. (68) Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. (69) We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

It was still going to be several years before I would begin to realize these wonderful truths. I still had four years left of running to do before the legs of the horse in my heart would be fully broken. It was going to be through this final entrepreneurial journey that God would finish that part of His work by bringing me to the valley of the shadow of death yet again. Then He could call me back to His House and into His service permanently.

Job 33:29-30 "God does all these things to a man— twice, even three times— (30) to turn back his soul from the pit, that the light of life may shine on him.

Chapter 13

From Rags to Deceptive Riches

Before I begin this chapter, I wish to express my discomfort in writing it, and I wish to point out that if it were up to me, I would not share so many of these details. For me, there was too much fool, and not enough God in me for any of these seasons of my life to count. However, in obedience to the Father, I write them because they show in brilliant color just how absolutely foolish and carnal I was, and more importantly how patient and merciful our Father in heaven is. I like to think that if God could forgive me, if He could tolerate me, if He could wait patiently for me, then He can do so for anyone!

To me, there is clearly more hope for a dirty rotten sinner than there is a fool, and that's exactly what I've been for so many years. As you patiently read or listen to all my stories in this book in a matter of hours, just imagine Father's patience to have had to watch it and endure it moment by moment, foolish decision

after foolish decision, over the span of many years. What kind of a God is this? Why didn't he just send a flood into my life and wipe me out for good? Why didn't he just decide that he was grieved that He made me and that His heart was filled with pain, because he saw that from my youth every inclination of my heart was to live like a fool and to run like a prostitute to men, and the world for my pleasures and fulfillment.

Genesis 6:5-6 The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. (6) The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.

Along with the last few chapters, it's been a constant humbling torment for me to have to re-live these parts of my past, but I see how good it is that Father is reminding me of what a worldly fool I was, and how much of an unworthy servant I still am. It's difficult to become prideful when you have, and *remember*, a past like mine. Please remember that these details are meant to honor God's indescribable mercy and long-suffering patience, not my carnal adventures and so-called *successes*. Thank you so much Father for saving me from my worldly and foolish pursuits of things that would never last. Now, on with the story.

In March of 2005, Jennifer became a child ambassador for World Vision, a large organization dedicated to reaching orphans in 3rd World Nations with their necessary temporal provisions and the gospel of Jesus Christ. She was qualified because we had adopted over fifty children from World Vision on their monthly support program, through a portion of our gym member's monthly dues. This kept her busy and gave her something to put her teeth into for a while, besides me.

As the development of my online sales training system continued, I had been able to earn enough money to keep paying the developer, but by the time the project was nearly ready to launch, we were in a financial crisis. The following is an email update which I wrote to Larry, my good friend, and life coach at the time.

May 17th 2005

I'm a story in the making over here Larry. We're one week in front of the "beta launch" of Revelation ITS and this has been the roughest week we've been through in a long time. I have spent every penny I have on getting this project completed. The company in Vegas is late again on my paycheck and they were late invoicing my clients, so my check was only for \$535 instead of the regular \$1500 or so. I've got one car about to be repossessed any day, my phone and internet is going to be turned off either today or tomorrow. My car insurance is going to be cancelled, because there was no money in the account to cover the electronic payment. One of my cars is sitting in the garage without a drop of gas in it. Jennifer got in it this week and it ran out of gas in the drive way. CAN YOU BELIEVE THIS? I'm actually cracking up writing down all of this. It's like some kind of a joke or something, but what a cool story it will make about 90 days from now, when we're headed to victory lane....GOD WILLING. To top it all off, and this is the lowest of lows, we had to take change from Tyler's piggy bank again this week, just to eat. Also, the project is being delayed because I can't even afford to buy a \$119 piece of software to get the videos compressed into FLASH and get them over to the developer.

Other than that, EVERYTHING IS JUST GREAT! All joking aside, I was so depressed last night, and I told myself that I was going to be blessed to wake up alive today and I am. I drove to Dunkin Donuts this morning to get Jennifer and I a bagel sandwich and celebrate because we could afford to eat something other than PB&J or pasta. When I got in the car, the song "Blessed Be the Name" was on and I heard the lyrics, "The Lord gives and takes away, but my heart will choose to say, Lord Blessed be YOUR name". It was a quick reminder to be grateful and trust him in all circumstances. We just did a study on contentment in our Men's Bible Study and it has been a good reminder during this time. Here is my final comfort. As I was going through the drive thru this morning to get those sandwiches, I saw the homeless guys that always

hang out right next door. I realized that if I went over to those guys and told them my story....broke, no gas, phone about to be turned off, etc..... that they would LAUGH me out of the parking lot. Yet again, a good reminder that just when I think I've got it BAD, there's always someone who has it much worse. I woke up alive today, with my family and in a clean home where the lights are still on....at least for now!

Not only had I spent all our personal money, but I had also put all \$25k that my client had paid me for writing and videoing the training, into the development of the software. We were just about to launch, and I desperately needed more money. That same client believed so much in the product and my training, that they offered to invest in the company. I was very excited, until I told Jennifer. She flipped out and wanted absolute no one having a part of the company, no matter how much we needed the money. This business was entirely my idea and totally dependent on my sales training and sales skills, but she still wanted to control me in it. We had many fights as a result. I needed desperately to move forward, and she needed desperately to control me. Her fear of me having a partner was based on her fear of losing control of me. I can see that she didn't want to have to compete with anyone else for control in my life, including God, which becomes apparent later.

She put her foot down about not giving up any percentage of the company, and I knew I had to give in, or there would be much suffering to pay at home. Soon, a new business acquaintance gave me this idea for a revenue sharing investment strategy, where I could raise some needed capital and still retain 100% ownership. We drew up a sample agreement and both myself and my clients really liked the idea. The next thing I knew, we had a check for \$100,000 in our hands, and I was thankful that Jennifer had stood against a partnership because it had saved me from giving up 10% of the company. I believe I would have been more successful with these guys as a partner and I'm confident God did not allow this to happen for that very reason. He was going to hold me back from going too far with this. Indeed, a Romans 8:28 moment.

On **May 25th, 2005**, we launched the very first Beta version of the Revelation ITS training system for our home improvement client. Several colleagues and friends all replied with great enthusiasm for the system and my training inside of it. We kept moving forward on finishing the system and at the same time I was prospecting for some more clients, while still working from our spare bedroom.

In **September of 2005**, by Divine providence, I dropped off our baby sitter at her house, only to discover that she was the daughter of my friend Matt Eldridge's old pastor, who years earlier we used to feed the homeless people in downtown Orlando with. After he and I got over the shock of seeing each other again, he introduced me to his friend Shawn who happened to be at his house visiting. When Shawn asked what I did, and found out we were working from home, he asked me if I had ever heard of the University of Central Florida's Technology Incubator. This was a program designed to help start-up or growth stage technology companies to get a leg up, by helping with reduced rate professional office space, preferred contacts to professional service providers, and quite a bit of free education. Soon after, I applied to the Incubator for our company.

In **October of 2005**, David Walsh, a good friend and former boss of mine for a short period of time while working for that first sales trainer, introduced our training system to his contacts at Enterprise Car Sales. David had been conducting all their sales training and they were really excited about the virtual training and agreed to pilot it in a few of their locations.

By **November of 2005**, I completed the requirements and we were accepted into the UCF Technology Incubator. This is where God would introduce me to one of the most special friends in my life, a woman that to this day, I am not able to fully express my admiration for in words. Her name is Carol Ann Dykes, a dear beloved and loyal sister of mine in Christ. Carol Ann was the onsite director of the Incubator at that time I was a client. She was like a mother to all of us baby entrepreneurs, and I'm sure I'm in a long line

of people who claim to be her biggest fan, but God indeed had a very special relationship planned for she and I.

Carol Ann was going to be on the inside circle of my life, from this point forward. She was going to have a front row seat of my ascent into the clouds, and my falling out of the sky. She was my vendor, my sister in Christ, one of my board of advisors, and one of my best friends, the kind that was going to be a witness at my upcoming divorce trial of the century. I've met very few people less judgmental, and more loyal or loving, than her. I have traveled all over the United States and have met thousands of people throughout my career. Carol Ann Dykes is on my short list of extraordinary ones.

Once we got moved in to the incubator, we hired a few more people and the business continued to grow. I was so excited and thanked God often for blessing our business. It was so exciting. After seeing how well the Enterprise Car Sales training system was turning out, David also introduced me to the 17th largest privately held company in the United States, JM Family Enterprises in Deerfield Beach, FL.

It was around this same time that word had gotten back to the owner of the company I had been an independent agent for in Las Vegas, that I had started my own online training system, using the information I learned while working for his company. He immediately began sending me a series of threatening emails like the following.

November 10th, 2005

"You got greedy Mike. I am ashamed to know you. You have embarrassed the Father. Now, I must pursue all legal means to try and restore justice and stop you from profiting in any way from my invention. You and I agreed that you wouldn't steal clients, prospective clients or try and copy our system in anyway. You should be ashamed and embarrassed! What would your Church think of you? It's no wonder you lost your Gym and have failed in the past, you are man of NO INTEGRITY.

Again, this part of my story is strikingly familiar to Jacob's. After Jacob realized that Laban, his father-in-law and employer, had an attitude change toward him, and had been cheating him out of wages for years, he decided to leave quietly and go out on his own. God saw what Laban had been doing to Jacob, and He gave him favor, such that he ended up leaving with the strongest of Laban's flock. When Jacob finally left him secretly, Laban found out and came back after him to accuse and threaten him, but God stopped it from going too far.

Genesis 31:26-30 Then Laban said to Jacob, "What have you done? You've deceived me, and you've carried off my daughters like captives in war. (27) Why did you run off secretly and deceive me? ...You have done a foolish thing. (29) I have the power to harm you; but last night the God of your father said to me, 'Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad.' (30) Now you have gone off because you longed to return to your father's house. But why did you steal my gods?"

Indeed, God had blessed Laban's flock because of Jacob, and then when Laban returned evil for good, God began blessing Jacob and preparing to move Jacob out on his own with ample resources for his own family.

In Genesis 31:42, Jacob said to Laban, "If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been with me, you would surely have sent me away empty-handed. But God has seen my hardship and the toil of my hands, and last night he rebuked you."

Laban couldn't see all the times he cheated Jacob, and neither was this man able to see how he had cheated me. He felt that all the clients I went out and produced, through my own past relationships, all belonged to him. His legal threats continued, and finally so did a lawsuit. I prayerfully asked and expected God's help,

but I also had to hire an attorney who discovered that he had sued several other previous “agents” under similar circumstances to mine. We reminded him in our legal response that he never honored me with a sales agent agreement or requested me to sign a non-compete clause. My attorney then threatened a counter suit for the \$45k in backed commissions, and for the remaining \$100k which were due to me for future monies paid under contracts I had sold.

Just as Jacob had been cheated, but then left with a flock that had been produced from Laban’s original flock, I too had been cheated and left with a flock of ideas that had been produced from this man’s original idea. I was anxious after first receiving his threats, and the devil tried to fire all kinds of fiery arrows at me, accusing me of having stolen his intellectual property, even though all I left with was the concept ideas and video production practices, not any actual code. Nevertheless, my conscience remained clear under the circumstances and I kept moving forward trusting God, especially since He had told me on that beach in the Bahamas that I could do this on my own.

I have since found out that I was wrong in what I wrote in the previous chapter when I said, I produced more income for his company in 6 months, than they had produced in the previous two years. I found the legal letters and it was actually the previous five years, not two. I had worked very hard to help them achieve the credibility they were still missing, and I leveraged my relationships to get him his largest clients to date. In return, he embarrassed me terribly a few times with his “*I am the man*”, viva Las Vegas attitude, while in front of large prospects like AutoNation and Daimler Chrysler, where he blew any chance, I had at earning their business.

At that time, and despite my enemy’s harassments, I kept moving forward in the business and by end of 2005, after nine-months as a startup business, we had generated about \$86,000 in revenue, working from a spare bedroom in our house, with a system that we owned debt free, excluding the revenue sharing monies. Jennifer and I were getting along well enough and she began helping me with the billing side of the business.

On **January 13th, 2006**, after going ten years without a dirt bike, I had made arrangements to purchase a used one from a man in Georgia, and I was so excited. He was coming to FL that day, spending the night in Orlando, and going back the next day after the purchase. Less than one-hour before he arrived in Orlando with the dirt bike, Jennifer’s water broke with our third child, and second son, Nathaniel Michael Chriswell.

I had already paid the guy a nice deposit on the bike and I knew it would never last overnight on the back of his truck at a hotel. I decided to take a gamble and I had my one part-time employee take Jennifer to the hospital, while I ran with a friend who had a truck to go meet this guy downtown and pick up the motorcycle. I went as fast as I could to look the thing over and make sure all was as expected, paid him the money, and helped my friend load it up in his truck. Then, with my heart in my throat, I raced to the hospital worried the whole way, but found her sitting calmly in a waiting area, not yet fully in labor. I was so thankful to God, and I took probably the biggest sigh of relief of my life. If I would have been just 30 minutes later, I would have been in trouble. In honor of Nathan’s birth, I picked the number 113 for my racing plate numbers.

I praised God that I made it to his birth that day, but I’m also terrible ashamed to look back and see how much I cared about that dirt bike. Because of my emotional attachment to it as a teenager, this one was going to become an idol to me. It is memories like these, that prevent me from being able to look down on Jacob’s carnality in the Old Covenant. Embarrassingly, I was supposed to be a so called “Spirit filled” Christian when these things were happening.

In March, just as we were finishing up the Enterprise Car Sales training program, I was invited to attend a Lifework Leadership event where Dan Cathy, the president of Chick-fil-a was coming to speak. During a coffee break, I bumped into a gentleman wearing a shirt with the Regal Boats logo on it. I said, “*Ah, Regal*

Boats, I used to work for a man named Kim Hackett, who co-owned an airplane with Duane Kuck the president of Regal Boats, my name is Michael and you are?" He replied, "I'm that Duane Kuck".

I couldn't believe it, I just had just bumped into the President of one of the largest privately-owned boat manufacturers in the world. He asked me what I was doing now, and I explained it to him by sharing what we were doing for Enterprise Car Sales and gave him my card. He was interested in hearing more and said he would pass my card on to his VP of sales. I didn't hold my breath, but he seemed sincere. A few days later, I received a call from Duffy Stenger, the VP of Sales. We met at one of their largest dealers, and I showed the sales training system we were building for Enterprise Car Sales. They were sold on the idea and invited me to their next annual sales conference where all their world-wide dealers fly in, so I could sign up as many dealers as I could. With Regal's endorsement, I was able to sign up a good number of the dealers and I began writing and producing a custom sales training program for all of their dealers right away. It was a contract worth about a quarter of million dollars in revenue over the contract term.

In addition to the custom sales training projects I was producing, I had been given the idea by Greg Mills, my pastor at the time, that it would fill a great need if I would start channeling some of my positive attitude and life lessons into short daily videos that could help keep people motivated since their leaders don't often have the time. From that idea, I began collaborating with someone to build the project, who would become one of my dearest friends to this day.

I had met Gustavo Hernando just a few years earlier when I was first researching the development of my online training system. We had our first meeting at Panera Bread in Waterford Lakes to discuss me hiring him as a freelance developer to build my flash-based training site. He had a background in digital media and graduated from Full Sail University and was very talented with web design. Gustavo was a minimalist when it came to life and web design and he was going to become the simple to my complicated in many projects over the years.

I had so much respect for Gustavo from the very first time I met him, and I hoped very much to be able to work with him on my Revelations training system. As it turned out, my training site was quite a bit more complex than what Gustavo wanted to do on his own at the time, but he continued to consult with us on the design and development, until we started my second company called Kickstart Productions. Kickstart Productions started with the idea Greg Mills had given me about daily motivational videos. The first piece of the Kickstart brand was KickstartMyDay.com and I then started planning for Kickstart My Sales, Kickstart my purpose, and soon I began even thinking about Kickstart my faith. The name and logo were both inspired by my love for dirt bikes. Kickstart became Gustavo's main web project to work with me on and everyone was very excited about this project, especially me.

While Gustavo built the platform and sites, my production manager and I started driving around to neat places and cities to film these short daily motivational videos. We started offering monthly subscriptions to the daily videos which were sent out via email, and we gave free subscriptions to all our custom sales training clients.

The results were extraordinary. People became addicted to the Kickstart messages and even a few of my closest friends told me that this is what I designed to do. It got to the point where if we didn't have a video up by 11am, people would call our office or email us wanting to know where their daily Kickstart video was. People said they were so motivated by them and they were so interesting because they always felt like they were on vacation with me, wherever we went and filmed them. My production team and I thought of all kinds of creative ways and places to film the messages, so that the shoot locations served as an illustration for the message, like parables. It got to the point, where I was able to see a Kickstart lesson in almost every experience I had, or object I came across. Because I loved my dirt bike so much, I made sure

we incorporated lots of footage of me riding, in the videos. I covered all kinds of life topics and shared stories and illustrations from my own life, regarding work, business, relationships, family, goals, attitude, dreams, adversity, etc. Occasionally, I would even make a general mention of God.

We had so much fun shooting and producing these videos and we started cranking them out as fast as we could to keep up with the demand for five videos per week. I was getting a lot of personal fulfillment from this because it put me back in line with my original purpose of starting the company to begin with, and the feedback from subscribers was wonderful. I started thinking of what kind of impact it could make if one million people a day in the marketplace were starting their day with Kickstart videos. A few distinguished people in the business world even started watching the videos, most notably Amit Gupta and Seth Godin, authors of the book *Purple Cow*.

After several months of antagonism, the lawsuit against me from the guy in Vegas was dismissed on April 14th, 2006. In searching through my old emails to detail this part of the story, I noticed that the case number ended in 777. This is a fascinating fact to discover after what happened in my divorce case, which you will hear about later.

Ironically, at this same time in **April**, Jennifer was pushing me to build up my live speaking and training business. She found out that I had earned enough money as a speaker to become a professional member of the National Speakers Association, and she filled out all the forms for me to become a member.

On **June 13th, 2006** I conducted a sales presentation with the C-Level executives from the Jim Moran Family of Companies, which at the time was the 17th largest privately held company in the country. This was the most valuable sales presentation I had ever made in my sales career. I was on a high trust referral from David Walsh, but they were all bottom line executives and in no mood for a “sales pitch”. I finished my presentation and walked out of the room, feeling as good about my presentation as any I had ever done. It was a homerun, but there were many months of due diligence and contract negotiations still ahead.

In September, the National Speakers Association held their annual convention in Orlando, FL, where we lived, so we not only decided to attend, but we went as a vendor to showcase the Revelation ITS system to all the professional speakers, who may wish to create and sell their own online content. It was at that show, that a 10-year dream of mine came true. Imagine getting to meet your hero, the person you would most like to meet on this earth. For me, that was Zig Ziglar, considered by most to be the greatest motivational speaker that ever lived. Not only did I get to meet him, but he and his wife Jean spent about 20 minutes in our booth talking with us. A video clip of me talking to Zig and Jean, from this exact moment I’m describing, can be seen in my story video called “Trusting God in the Storm”, on YouTube or our RelentlessHeart.com website. I was very anxious about introducing my training system to his company, and to somehow unwind the fact that I had already shown my enemy’s system to his son Tom Ziglar, the president of Zig’s training company.

While everyone was taking pictures, Jean gave me a big kiss on the cheek and even invited Jennifer and I to bring the kids and come visit them in Dallas. Because I was still so carnal, I was just in awe, and so star struck by this. Much of my mind and discretionary time was still focused on things below, not above. This is the major difference between a carnal believer and a spiritual believer, and this is the major difference between my life then, and my life now.

Romans 8:5 Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.

Col 3:1-3 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. (2) Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. (3) For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

Joe and Diane Calhoun were also there in the booth with us that day. Joe was an outspoken believer in Christ, a professional speaker, an author, and a successful business consultant. Zig had hired Joe's company to do some in-house consulting for his own company, and Joe and I were going to begin a business and personal relationship that day as well.

I met quite a few famous speakers at that convention, including one of the most arrogant of all the famous speakers, but after meeting Zig, my head was in the clouds. I still had such an orphan heart, and had been looking so long for a mentor, a man who could lead me and teach me how to be successful, and now here I had just met my hero, a person I had so much in common with, and whom I would have given almost anything to have mentor me. I now know how jealous my Father in heaven must have been on that day, when He saw how I was looking to, and hoping in a man, a man made of dust. I didn't have eyes to see that back then, so I was going to pursue this relationship and beg God to open the door for me to be in Zig's life.

The email that I wrote to friends and family after that meeting is so shameful for me to read. The entire email screams of my own carnality, my insecurities, my relentless need to prove myself to others, my hopes of gaining honor for myself through association to someone famous, and from God's perspective, the worship of a man made of dust.

Isaiah 2:22 NASB Stop regarding man, whose breath of life is in his nostrils; For why should he be esteemed?

In those days, there was not a single person in my life, friend, family or business acquaintances, that I wouldn't brag to about every little exciting thing that would happen in my life. I remember sitting down to email these things and just thinking of all the people I should tell. I would even copy people that I hadn't spoken to in sometime, or people that I didn't even know all that well, because I so badly wanted people to know that I was succeeding, and I was valuable, or that I was doing something cool or exciting or that I was being associated with someone who was.

Today, I'm so blessed to be able to testify before God, that the opposite is now true. Today, there is not a single person in my life, not even my wife or my closest friends, who know every neat thing that happens in my life anymore. I have many experiences and encounters that I simply don't tell anyone about. I love testifying to the power of God, but I no longer have that need to gain the approval of others, not even my wife Persis, which to me is a true miracle work of God in my heart.

For all those years, I had to boast about everything I did, or every neat thing that happened! I couldn't do hardly any good deed in secret. This didn't change even after I fully surrendered to God. I was in such humble circumstances, and looked like a fool to most people, so I still felt that same need to tell those around me every little thing God did, or how he spoke to me, or how He used me. My motive was not primarily so that He would be glorified through my testimony (which is the case now), but so that I could gain the approval of others. I will have no reward in heaven for many good things I have done, because I did them to be seen and honored by men. I was not yet able to stand secure in God's opinion of me and independent of the opinion of others. Thank you, Father, for having mercy on my insecure soul, which so persistently sought and needed the praise of men all my life.

Matthew 6:1 "Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. (3) But when you give to the needy, do not let your

left hand know what your right hand is doing, (4) so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

I was head over heels for Zig, and believed he had all the wisdom and answers for my life and future business success. It truly is offensive to look back on, but I now have a better understanding of why God didn't just turn away from me in the face of all my carnality. All of us who are called to know God, must be able to feel the terrible shame of our sin and rebellion against God, which leads us to humility. There is no other way to truly receive and *appreciate* His mercy and love.

Luke 7:47 "For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little."

Oh, how afflicting it is to look back on these periods of my life, with the spiritual eyes that I now have in Christ Jesus! In His mercy, the days of my disciplining and severe chastening were coming. But first, I had more mountain to climb, and greater heights to take, because the fall needed to be from very high and the discipline needed to be extremely painful, in order to be effective against my stubborn heart. Nothing can drive our deeply rooted self-life to its knees, and produce the character of Christ in our heart, like searing pain and affliction.

Hebrews 5:8 Although he [Jesus] was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered

Hebrews 12:11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Before I share this next part of the story, I realize that it might make some people uncomfortable, especially religious people who have grown up in church and have been taught that these things should never be talked about, especially publicly. I'm not suggesting you follow my example in this, unless the Holy Spirit leads you to do so, but I do wish to point out that God never hides scandals or whitewashes the testimonies of those in the Bible, not even from His only begotten Son's lineage. In the first chapter of Matthew, God did not hesitate to mention the names of the people in the genealogy of Jesus Christ, who represented terrible scandals in the history of Israel.

We see Tamar who commits prostitution and incest with Judah, after God put both of her husbands to death, one of which for spilling his semen on the ground rather than impregnating her, as was his obligation to his deceased brother and her husband. We see Rahab representing more prostitution, or Uriah and Bathsheba representing adultery and murder in his genealogy. Not to mention Abraham and Hagar, or Abraham allowing Sarah to be defiled by the king of Egypt taking her as his wife and sleeping with her. The Bible is RAW regarding the stories of many of its most beloved characters, and it does not attempt to whitewash over sins or the terrible consequences thereof. Also, for those who may wish to suggest, "*God would never have you expose someone else's sins*", let me point out that almost none of the sins in the Bible were exposed by the sinner who committed them. Not even the apostle Peter wrote about his own sin of hypocrisy, but rather it was the Holy Spirit who had the apostle Paul record Peter's hypocrisy in Galatians 2:11-14. What I share, I do so in obedience to God. Now, back to the story.

It was around **June of 2006**, that Jennifer started asking me to get a vasectomy, so we wouldn't have any more children. I was very intimidated by the idea, and a friend of mine told me that he felt it had affected his sexual enjoyment, so naturally as a very worldly and carnal believer, I became alarmed. I procrastinated for a while, but finally she pressured me into making an appt. At the consultation they gave me a future appointment for the procedure and the doctor told me to be sure we used contraception until then. I explained this to Jennifer and she felt it wasn't necessary. Just as my appointment time arrived, a hurricane

started heading straight towards Central Florida and my appointment was rescheduled for a later date. Soon, she was pregnant.

This was our second unplanned pregnancy, and Jennifer became livid. She immediately began screaming and blaming the pregnancy all on me, saying it was all my fault and that this only happened because I delayed getting the procedure because all I cared about was my own satisfaction. She had no ability to see that she was the one who said no to contraception. Things were about to get much worse. On one of her doctor's visits, she found out she was pregnant with twins. She was so devastated at the news that they had to escort her to her car and ask her if she needed a ride home. She told me she sat in her car devastated, screaming and crying for a long time. She began hating me and considered having another abortion, screaming, *"Now, my life is ruined for the next 18 years because of you!"* This was coming from the same woman who had become a World Vision Child Ambassador, claiming to have a heart for orphans.

This was a very bitter-sweet moment for me. I was so hurt and angry to see this hatred for me and her despising of this pregnancy, while at the same time, I was filled with joy in my heart that we were having twins. My first thought to her was, *"Don't you see what a miracle this is? God is giving us back what we threw away when we were teenagers. Those babies are a gift of God's mercy back to us, in spite of what we did."* She was not able to hear anything I said and began treating me with such contempt that is indescribable. To make things even worse, she had cancelled our maternity coverage on our health insurance plan, thinking we wouldn't need it anymore. We would now be required to pay for everything during this pregnancy out of our own pocket.

In **September of 2006**, I had the vasectomy procedure done and hoped this would help give her some sense of relief and lessen her anger towards me. However, by the end of 2006, we had come to one of the darkest places we had been in our marriage so far. She still took no responsibility for her part in the pregnancy at all. To punish me, she withheld all physical intimacy from me for the next year or so. Most of my requests for intimacy were met with accusations that I was a sex addict, who only cared about my own needs. The emotional pain became so frustrating, that after one final argument about it, I punched a hole in my closet door, and tried to hurt myself physically to take away the sexual desire that was causing me so much mental anguish. I even got mad at God yelling something like, *"why did you even give me this dreadful desire, that I am now so tormented by?"*

Because I was still a very carnal Christian, I was not receiving the grace of God in this area and I was still deeply impacted and hurt by things that denied my flesh its desires, even though they were perfectly lawful. It's not against God to desire sexual intimacy with your spouse, but there is a higher place of contentment in Christ, where sex is no longer so important, and your sex drive is no longer your master. I didn't yet know this kind of contentment in Christ existed. Sex had always been very important to me and was one of the only ways I felt "love" from my spouse because she rarely showed me affection in any other way.

On **November 4th, 2006** – Jennifer and I were given the surprising opportunity to attend Zig Ziglar's 80th Birthday part in Dallas, TX. Even though we were having terrible tension in the relationship, we both knew it would be good for our business if we went, so we did. There were about a thousand people invited to celebrate Zig, but we got to attend the private portion of the party where there were less than a hundred and twenty people in the room with Zig and his closest friends and colleagues. I looked around and tried to imagine the caliber of people that were in that small room that night, and at the same time I was trying hard not to allow my eyes to look like saucers. For me, it was like being at a Hollywood awards show in the business world. That was the room where I met Peter Lowe, the President at the time, of Get Motivated Seminars, the largest business seminar company in the world, where they bring in the top business experts

and political leaders from around the world to speak to packed stadiums of thousands of business professionals all over the country. Zig had been speaking on their tours for many years.

There was still so much animosity and tension between Jennifer and I, but we were both faking it for this event, and in front of the people we were meeting. To the great shock of both of us, as we were on our way to our dinner table, the guy from the Las Vegas training company I had worked for, the one who had tried to sue me, was at this same event with some of his team members. Talk about a surprising and awkward moment! Both of us were shocked to see the other. The only reason he and his team members were there was because I had introduced their company to Tom Ziglar, and now they were doing business with each other.

My enemy now had the business of my hero, and all because I had made the introduction. It was like a painful knife of betrayal to my heart. Imagine introducing your girlfriend or boyfriend to a friend you admire, but soon the friend betrays you and then your girlfriend or boyfriends moves into a relationship with them because you introduced them and spoke so highly of them in the beginning.

Nevertheless, in that moment, he was embarrassed and became very docile towards me. We shared a few gentle words and then both agreed to a verbal truce, and to go our own ways and leave each other alone to conduct our own business. Again, it was just like the arrangement that Laban and Jacob made with each other in Genesis 31, where they agreed to live at peace with one another and not to cross each other's territory. I walked away feeling a sense of closure on that dark chapter of my life, and indeed he never harassed me or sent nasty emails to me again after that. The meeting was clearly the providence of God.

Even with the shock of that meeting, it still didn't shake Jennifer and I out of our tension and hurt feelings towards each other. There was a terrible tension between us, but we just kept smiling and laughing like it was a Sunday morning at church. For me, the excitement of being that close to Zig was genuine and I just kept my focus on that. I had hoped that the excitement of this event and the meetings we had would shake her loose from her hate for me, and that we could enjoy some husband and wife time that evening. I was wrong again. She was just as hardened as always and refused to validate any of my feelings or needs.

We had been invited to go to church with Zig the next morning, and to hear him teach Sunday school. By the morning, I was so frustrated with Jennifer, that I could no longer fake it with her by my side in front of others at church. I let her go by herself and told her to just tell them I wasn't feeling well, which was an understatement. I was so angry and so hurt, that I was willing to miss hearing my hero preach in church the next morning because in my heart I could only see red.

They say the body's desire for sex is second only to food and water, and I believe it. There were nights that my frustration from her rejection were so high that I couldn't go to sleep. Sometimes, I would put my headphones in my ears and turn the volume all the way up intentionally to try to cause myself intense pain to distract me away from the physical and mental anguish I was in from my spouse constantly rejecting me. As a result, I also found myself enslaved to masturbation for many years, even as a married man. I was too afraid of God to use pornography, and I made sure to think of no woman except my wife, because to do so would be adultery, but there seemed no other way to get my mind and body to stop screaming. The more she rejected me, the worse the desire and the more excruciating the pain became, because when your flesh is starved for something, it becomes almost the only thing you can think about.

Masturbation is a gray area for many people since it is not specifically mentioned in the Scriptures, but years later, the Lord would show me that it makes you a slave to your flesh, and a slave has no permanent place in heaven (See John 8:31-36). Peter said, that a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him. The flesh never says, "*Ok, thank you. I'm satisfied...that was enough.*" No, it always wants more, and in fact,

the more you feed it, the more it wants, and the more you become enslaved to its demands. It gets to the point where whenever your flesh wants pleasure, it simply pulls your chain and gets its way. It becomes a cruel master and soon, the only way for you to have any peace in your life is to meet its demands. Sure, it gives you temporary pleasure and peace, but that is all very temporary and only lasts until your master starts calling your name again. You cannot serve two masters (Matthew 6:24). God may be calling you in one way, but if your flesh wants its pleasure, it can pull your chain and drag you away from God's calling and make you heed its call. There is no way to live like that and please God.

The frustration levels of living with her treating me like this were excruciating, but I now see how much I needed this kind of suffering if God was ever going to get my attention at a deep level and break me free from my stubborn self-life and my sinful flesh. Even though my desire for sex with my wife wasn't abnormal or unlawful, and even though I wasn't watching pornography or having an affair, I was still a slave to my flesh, and God was going to show me how to be free one day by the power of His Spirit.

Through this and many other experiences, I have found a great secret to peace and happiness in the Christian life. It is much easier to die to yourself and your needs, than to fight to get them met. Instead of working so hard to try to get the people in my life to treat me differently, or to respect me, or honor me, or to meet my needs, instead I take up my cross and deny myself. It is so much simpler than trying to manage all the ways people fall short of your expectations and fretting about how you can influence them to change and meet your needs. Think of how much time people spend trying to manipulate or control other people to meet their needs.

Instead, you learn to take up your cross like Jesus and die to those unmet needs. It is painful at first, but it is so much greater to surrender a need and die to it, than to demand that it be met. I have found great freedom in Christ from the needs and demands of my flesh because I have and continue to crucify it. Imagine how your life would change if you were no longer hurt by how people neglected or disrespected you? You must go through pain to learn the principle, and the freedom is costly, but oh how glorious. Thank you, Father, for teaching me this principle and for your grace to put it into practice.

Remembering these past stories reminds me of just how rotten and stubborn my flesh could be when it didn't get its way, and what it looked like when it was still very much alive and hadn't yet been slain on the cross of Christ. I loved Jesus Christ, but I had no idea what it meant to take up my cross and die on it. My flesh could pull my chain any time it wanted and there wasn't anything I could do about it. I had no idea what it meant to crucify or put down the flesh, or to walk by the Spirit, so that I don't gratify the desires of my flesh. I was a powerless, frustrated, defeated, "church goer" that still thought I had certain rights of how my wife was supposed to treat me. I had NO IDEA what it meant to truly become a cross carrying Christian, which would one day get me out of the prison my flesh had me bound in, all my life.

Matthew 16:24-25 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. (25) For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.

Galatians 5:24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.

Romans 6:6-8 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— (7) because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. (8) Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

Eleven days later, on the 15th of November, we found out that JM Family enterprises decided to move forward into final contract negotiations for a private labeled version of our software. The contract was primarily a license to use our software on their server and would be nearly a half-million dollars over two years. I was beyond excited, but my marriage problems were right there to keep casting dark clouds over all these new successes.

On **November 19th, 2006**, I went to my local Barnes and Noble bookstore at the Waterford Lakes Town Center, looking desperately for some answers and hope to the pain in my marriage. I was in so much pain and ready to just give up. I ended up finding a secular book called “The Sex Starved Marriage”. That title perfectly described my marriage, so I sat down to read some of it right there in the store. I wasn’t a few pages in before I began weeping uncontrollably, right there in the store, as I read the stories of so many people who were describing this terribly painful situation, I too was in. Someone, albeit not my wife, was finally validating my feelings, and I found some temporary peace knowing I wasn’t alone, and that I wasn’t a crazy sex addict just because I desired regular physical intimacy with my wife, who was holding me prisoner. Oh, how badly I wanted her to read that book, thinking perhaps she would finally see the error of her ways. However, my reading that book didn’t change anything in my circumstances. She kept her hardened heart and poisonous anger directed full force at punishing me, and no matter how much I begged or pleaded for physical intimacy, I was shunned and scolded. As I reflect on this part of the story, considering what I now know, I believe it is very likely that she was doing all of this to me, hoping I would break down and have an affair. When you hear what happens later in the story, you’ll understand why I believe this.

Chapter 14

Holding a Tiger By the Tail

Isaiah 45:7 I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things.

Before I continue with the story, I want to remind you again of a very important principle to remember about God, and to believe by faith. When God directed me to tell the story of *all* that He has done in my life, that did not mean only the things which are perceived by most as being good things. It also meant that I must tell about the suffering and the evil which He directed at me, for my disciplining. Since God is Sovereign and in control of all people and circumstances in this world, when I, as a child of God, describe the evils that others did to me, I am telling *all* that God was doing in my life to discipline me, just as it says in Hebrews 12.

Someone once wrote, “*When a man has the conviction that he is doing the work God gave him to do, there is a zeal and a courage in his soul that all the forces of this world cannot destroy.*”

Therefore, I am not moved in the slightest bit, by the people who comment or email that I’m being unloving, or a slanderer, or who say how much they would loooove to hear my ex-wife’s side of the story. I’m confident many of them would also loooove to hear the Pharaoh’s side of the story, or Jezebel’s, or Joseph’s brothers or Potiphar’s wife, or Haman’s, or the Pharisees, or Judas Iscariot, or Alexander the metal worker’s side of the story.

Proverbs 18:17 The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him.

Indeed, Pharaoh and all the others mentioned have their own side of the story, but from God's plan and perspective, their side is completely irrelevant to all but the godless around them. Each of them had a divine purpose in God's master plan, to be used as evil, for the good of God's chosen people, but they had no idea that was happening. Pharaoh thought he was oppressing the Israelites to build his glorious empire, and Judas thought he was betraying Jesus for some money. They were both wrong, and neither of them were conscious of how God had intentionally raised them up to do evil.

Romans 9:17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth."

In our human understanding, we forget that God's ways are not our ways, and we make the mistake of thinking that God only brings people or circumstances into our life which make us comfortable, happy, or prosperous in some external or temporary way. Therefore, we naively assume that all good comes from God, and all bad comes from that dirty devil. For example, many Charismatics believe that *all* sickness comes only from Satan, and that if they are sick, it is *only* the devil they must contend with. This is a distorted view of the Sovereign God, and is simply not true, according to His word. Many times, God might be trying to discipline them, and instead of humbly heeding the rebuke, they stay fervently engaged in spiritual "warfare" against what they believe is just the devil's dirty attack. There are dozens of Scriptures that show God himself brings sickness on his children, not just the devil. Here are seven examples.

2 Samuel 12:15 After Nathan had gone home, the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife had borne to David, and he became ill.

2 Chronicles 21:18 After all this, the LORD afflicted Jehoram with an incurable disease of the bowels.

2 Chronicles 26:20 he [Uzziah], had leprosy on his forehead, so they hurried him out. Indeed, he himself was eager to leave, because the LORD had afflicted him.

Psalms 106:13-15 But they soon forgot what he had done and did not wait for his counsel. (14) In the desert they gave in to their craving; in the wasteland they put God to the test. (15) So he gave them what they asked for, but sent a wasting disease upon them.

John 9:1-3 As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. (2) His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (3) "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.

1 Corinthians 11:29-30 For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. (30) That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. Notice, it wasn't the devil who was making them weak and sick or dying, but rather the judgment of God.

2 Corinthians 12:7 To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Who gave Paul the thorn in his flesh, God or Satan?

Yes, the devil can attack your health and circumstances, but he cannot do so while acting apart from God's will in your life. If you read the autobiographies of some of God's greatest and most useful saints, you will find that almost all of them tell of times God severely afflicted them, not only in their life circumstances, but also on a sick bed or in some failure, to discipline them, and once they came into correction they were healed or given grace to overcome the affliction or failure. I can think of several times, myself, where I am confident that the Lord afflicted me with sickness to discipline me.

Lamentations 3:38 Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both calamities and good things come?

Two of the most vivid examples I've read recently have been the autobiographies of Madam Guyon and Lorenzo Dow. Madam Guyon spoke in detail of the mighty work God did on her pride, through a severe bout of the small pox, which left her stripped of the external beauty she had found so much pride in. The great preacher and evangelist Lorenzo Dow, born in 1777, showed great resistance to God's call on his life and was stricken with a terrible weakness and temporary loss of his eyesight. A second time he resisted, he was struck with such a sickness that others thought him to be dead.

An even more vivid example might be to read of all the times he himself, realizing it had worked on him, prayed for a certain person to become sick or afflicted because they stubbornly rejected the Gospel message, which he knew they desperately needed. He would openly tell them, that I am going to pray God brings an affliction to you, so you will repent and many times, the person he prayed for would come under some terrible sickness or affliction soon after, followed by their repentance unto God. God has a great purpose for troubles, so let us not give the devil credit for God's good, but often painful works, and let us not grumble either, but instead heed the voice of Job.

*Job 2:9-10 His wife said to him, "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!" (10) He replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman. **Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?"***

Job 5:18 For he wounds, but he also binds up; he injures, but his hands also heal.

This same truth also applies to the afflictions caused by people in our life, and when you truly know God you will believe and understand this great truth. When you read of the Pharaoh in the Bible, or you have someone who seems like a Pharaoh in your own life, he or she is not acting on their own, independent of God's knowledge or will. God specifically raised up the Pharaoh and hardened his heart against the Israelites to break them, and God raised up my ex-wife and hardened her heart against me, to break me. The main point I want you to be able to see is that the Pharaoh's hardened heart, and his oppression of the Israelites, was a "work" of God, not the devil. Joseph being hated and sold into slavery by his brothers, and then falsely charged with raping Potiphar's wife and being thrown into prison, was the work of God, not the devil. My ex-wife's hatred and malice towards me was a work of God, not the devil.

If you and I had been firsthand witnesses of Job's terrible demise, we surely would have assigned the blame on the Sabeans and Chaldeans, who executed the dirty work in Job 1:15,17. However, behind them, was the devil who was controlling them, and behind the devil was God, who was totally in control and gave permission for it all. Just like the Sabeans and Chaldeans, in Job's life, my ex-wife and others were pawns in the devil's hands, who was in turn a tool in God's hands, to execute the necessary spiritual heart surgery in my life. This will become even more clear as you read the rest of the story. It will become as clear to you, that *God* did all of this to me, as it had become to Joseph, that all his terrible afflictions were done by God.

*Genesis 45:4-8 Then Joseph said to his brothers.. "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! (5) And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that **God sent me ahead of you.** (7) **But God sent me ahead of you** to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. (8) **"So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God.***

Jesus taught that not even a sparrow can fall to the ground apart from the Father's will (Matthew 10:29), and how much more valuable are we than sparrows? Never forget, that in the life of a believer, the devil must always get permission from God to test or touch us, just as we can see in the stories of Job and Peter.

Job 1:10-12 [Satan speaking to God about Job] "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. (11) But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face." (12) The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger."

We need not fear that anything changed in the New Covenant either. We can see in the story of Peter that the devil still had to get permission first.

Luke 22:31-32 "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. (32) But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

When the devil gets permission to touch us, it is a work of God's good will, not Satan's. The devil is simply the messenger, or the tool in God's hands in that instance. Any strike which He allows is always for our ultimate good, and, to the Praise of our merciful God, it only lasts just as long as it is needed. Lest you be tempted to think wrong of God for allowing the devil to touch you, through the evil people around you, be sure to read the end of Job's story in chapter 42 and consider the outcome which the Lord finally brought about. Also, as you will see in my story, once the work was complete in my heart, God set me free from my oppressors, and sent me on my way with an abundance of spiritual plunder. Hallelujah!

Let us fully realize that when God's word says in Romans 8:28, that He works *everything* for the good, in the lives of those that love Him, and who are called according to His purpose, that a good deal of that "everything" is going to be trouble. I have yet to read in Christian history of any godly saint, who was useful to the kingdom, whose life story didn't contain plenty of trouble and hardships.

Acts 14:22 "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,"

By faith and patience, we can begin to see our stories from God's perspective, not just our shallow human perspective, where all we see are the Sabeans and Chaldeans who are afflicting us. By God's grace, you will be able to one day say, just like that great saint Hudson Taylor said, and now I too say, "*God is the One great circumstance in my life. All lesser external circumstances are necessarily the kindest, wisest and best because they are either ordered by Him or permitted by Him.*" What peace I have enjoyed, understanding this truth by knowing my God. Now, for your encouragement, let me continue with the story of *all* that our heavenly Father has done in my life, especially through trouble. You will see over the next few chapters that indeed, Satan was going to be given permission to sift me as wheat.

Desperate for Deliverance

It was near the end of 2006, while still suffering the intense pain from our marriage troubles, I heard someone say that, "*A broken family is far better than a broken home*". After thinking about that, I decided I was going to stand up against Jennifer's manipulation and control of me. My eyes were starting to open to what had been going on and I was now convinced it was never going to change, so I became determined to save myself from her. I decided that I was no longer willing to live with a person capable of this kind of evil from her heart, even if we had 30 children together. I felt I was no longer willing to endure her prison, just so the children wouldn't suffer from a divorce. It says in 1 Cor 7:15, regarding marriage, that God has called us to live in peace, and there was no peace in that marriage whatsoever. Therefore, I believed it would be better for the children not to see us at each other so much.

I typed up a long letter, explaining all the reasons why I wanted a divorce, but shortly after, the fear of being a divorced Christian and having to wear the Scarlet "D" in church, kept me from leaving the marriage. God was directing my every step, and He was not about to allow me to just run and be free yet. It reminds me of when Joseph tried to work a deliverance for himself with the Pharaoh's cup bearer and break maker, to get out of jail, in Genesis 40. Joseph not only didn't get out, but God decided to leave him in prison for two more years. My time in prison was not yet up either, and God was going to make certain that I knew He was the only One who could free me.

I know if God would have allowed me to save myself at that time, I would have soon gone right back to depending entirely on myself and living another "good life" apart from depending on Him. Also, in respect to my career, He was going to allow me to climb even higher, ensuring that when I fell, it would end, not just in disappointment, but in total brokenness and helplessness. Then and only then, would I be ready to be miraculously freed from my Pharaoh and my Egypt. I needed much more hammering than most, in order to learn the importance of being poor in spirit. I was not poor in spirit; I was entirely self-sufficient.

Matthew 5:3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

I think this is when I went back to believing that more money could save our marriage, and if not, it would at least prove I was not the loser she kept accusing me of being. God was about to let me find out, because in 2007 we were going to see more income than we had ever seen before. I believe God was going to allow me to put the "money god" to the test and see for myself if it was all powerful, and if it had all the answers to the problems I was facing in my life and marriage.

Judges 10:13-14 But you have forsaken me and served other gods, so I will no longer save you. (14) Go and cry out to the gods you have chosen. Let them save you when you are in trouble!"

On **January 4th, 2007**, we received a signed contract from JM Family Enterprises with an initial check for over a quarter of a million dollars, on a half-a-million-dollar contract. Almost immediately this felt like a shot of pain relief for my loss of dignity in the marriage. It put me on an emotional high, and gave me such a sense of "see, I told you so" to Jennifer, without having to say the words. I knew this was just the tip of the iceberg and that big things were coming.

I didn't use any of the money to increase our lifestyle. Instead, I started putting it back into the company to prepare for even greater growth. With the belief that things were going to continue to explode, I moved our business to a larger class A office space, bought more equipment, and hired a few more people. With clients this soon, like Regal Boats, Enterprise Car Sales, and now JM Family, I felt like I had hit the entrepreneur lottery.

On **January 16th, 2007**, just twelve days after receiving that huge check, I received an email from a man named Hal. I had met him years earlier, when he was the training director for a large car dealer in Virginia. Hal had worked with Steven Covey several years earlier and had many years of experience in the personal development arena. He was now contacting me on behalf of some businessmen in Salt Lake City, Utah, regarding taking online "personal development training" to the masses using my online technology. Their company was called Keypoint, and they were projecting hundreds of thousands of dollars of revenue per month, and were going to target the MLM companies, right in their backyard, with thousands of members. I was excited because this was right in line with my big expectations for our little company.

Part of me believed that Hal had faith in the same Jesus I did, but my enthusiasm diminished significantly when I learned all these men were Mormons. After my experience with Vince, back in the Lord's Gym days, I became very reluctant. However, I still trusted Hal, having had a business relationship with him

years earlier. Finally, I was enticed enough by the simplicity of the project and the income potential to consider moving forward.

Soon, I created a demo training video, using some of their content and mixing in some of my own. They were so impressed, that they asked me if I would also be willing to be the camera talent for the entire project. This really appealed to my ego, especially when Hal started saying, *“Chriswell...I’m so excited for you my friend. You’re going to become a household name like Tony Robbins after we take this to the masses.”*

It was around this same time, I believe in January of 2007, when Jennifer received some very disturbing news from her doctor, after an ultra-sound of the twins. Ashley was diagnosed with dilated loops of bowels, when the images showed that part of her bowels had not formed and there was a large hole in them. He told Jennifer that this was very serious, and if the pregnancy had not been so far along, he would have recommended terminating it. I couldn’t believe he would say such a thing, but this is exactly what God knew we both needed to hear. This news shocked Jennifer out of feeling so sorry for herself, and I saw her attitude change towards the pregnancy. She went from despising it, to now fighting for it. I immediately began to call upon the name of the Lord, and to pray for my daughter to be healed of this condition.

While all of this was going on behind the scenes, like a growing toddler, the business was still growing at 300% per year and demanding more and more of my time. Before long, I found myself becoming pulled in directions that I never wanted to go. I began to realize that I was a good trainer and speaker, but not a good business owner, especially in a high growth company. Soon, I felt like I had a Tiger by the tail. I had chosen to grab its tail to begin with, but it had grown much stronger than expected, and now I was exhausted from trying to keep hold of it, and I knew if I let it go, I would be ruined.

I started spending lots of time thinking of ways to solve my growing stress problem. I bought a few dozen day passes to the pool area at the local Ritz Carlton in Orlando, FL, and started going there weekly to read books on entrepreneurship, and to relax and think about my life and business plan. I was still praying and trusting God through all of this, but there was no real interaction between us, and no depth in my spirituality. I wasn’t hearing from Him or receiving personal guidance. It was more like I was just doing whatever I felt was the best and hoping God would open and close doors (herding me like cattle), to get me to the right place. I felt I loved Him, but there was no real personal relationship, and no understanding of what His mind was on what I was going through or doing, but just a shallow hope that He was somehow working all things out.

Even though I had started a technology company, my motive was quite different than many of the entrepreneurs I had met. I considered myself a lifestyle entrepreneur and I was driven by freedom, not by the money. However, since I didn’t understand true freedom in Christ yet, money seemed to be the only door to the freedom I wanted. That is when I had become open to all kinds of other projects that were outside of our core business plan of just doing my sales training programs. Soon, we started to attract the attention of larger companies. We received calls from Swarovski Crystal, Owens Corning Corporation, and one day I even walked into my office and saw a note from Scott Bly at the corporate offices of Lowes Home Improvement stores. We started receiving requests that took us further and further from our core business plan, like attorneys who wanted to use it to teach compliance, or the US Olympic Curling Association for training their associates.

At first, I think we were all excited by all this diversified growth and interest, but it didn’t last long. I remember hearing one entrepreneur say, *“growth for the sake of growth is what cancer does. It has no other purpose.”* I felt like that was happening to me and I was becoming more and more miserable. I had been simply following the money to gain my freedom, which made sense for a while, but now it had once

again turned on me, stolen my freedom, and made me its miserable slave. It reminds me of how sin works. You have the freedom to choose it, until one day it turns and chooses you back, resulting in the loss of your freedom.

Even my employees confessed they were not having as much job satisfaction working on these kinds of projects. This gave me the extra motivation, during those pool side thinking sessions, to resolve making my business once again fit back into my life and original purpose, rather than my life and purpose having to fit into the business. This was going to turn out to be much easier said than done, because the company was growing so quickly now, and it was still so dependent on me.

By April of 2007, the stress caused by all this fast growth, caused me to be open to shifting more of our focus into the Keypoint deal, even though they were Mormons. After several months of serious talks and demos, Justin and I flew out to Salt Lake City that same month to meet them. They rolled out the red carpet for us and treated us like we were their family. They knew I loved dirt bikes and trail riding, so they took us out for a whole day riding deep in the mountains east of Provo, UT on their four wheelers. They even took us to one of their incredible mountain homes, so we could see they were well capitalized and very serious. The trip was a delight and Justin and I both left Salt Lake City feeling so good about this relationship. We drew up and signed a contract and agreed to begin moving forward. Again, just like Eve to the fruit in the Garden of Eden, or Lot to the lands of Sodom, and me to my marriage to Jennifer, I was once again being drawn into something by my own understanding, my own perceived needs, and by how attractive something appeared on the outside, rather than by God's Spirit and guidance.

That same month, as part of my plans to fix my business life, we agreed to hire Joe Calhoon, as a consultant, to come in and take our company through his program over one year. Joe had our whole team take personality and behavioral assessment profiles, and then he flew in and got us kicked off with some live coaching. Everyone was very impressed, and I was convinced this was going to be a big part of the answer I had been looking for.

Then, the following month, on May 1st, 2007, just as I was beginning to sink my teeth into producing the training videos for Keypoint, and just as we were getting kicked off with Joe's program, Jennifer gave premature birth, by a few weeks, to our twins Ashley and Kaley. This turned out to be an extraordinary experience for both of us. Unlike the births of Tyler, Chelsea and Nathan, when the twins were born, I found myself torn between them because they were placed in separate beds quite far apart from one another.

To the praise of God, the latest ultrasounds had showed no sign of the dilated loops of bowels in Ashley anymore. I was so thankful to God for that, but when she came out via C-section, she was very distressed and had quite a bit of liquid in her lungs. Her crying and screaming was very stressful for me because there was nothing I could do for her until they finished getting her stabilized. Most babies stop screaming, but Ashley wouldn't stop, and my stress levels were rising quickly. The nurses could tell I was very worried and finally gave me permission to go to her in her little incubator bed. What happened next was precious. Over her screams, I got my head down by her left ear very closely and started talking gently to her, to let her know that her Daddy was here now, and that she was going to be just fine.

I caught the whole thing on camera, and as soon as she heard my voice, she turned her head towards me and tried to open her little salve covered eyes. Immediately her uncontrollable screaming and crying stopped and turned to a mild whimper and little gasps of air to catch her breath. The sound of her Daddy's voice, and the sense of my presence, broke through her fears and panic, giving her little heart peace. Years later, I would reflect on this moment after having the same exact experience with my heavenly Daddy, where the spiritual sound of His voice, and the sense of His presence, brought deep peace to my heart in a terrifying storm of life circumstances.

Psalm 16:8-9, 17:15 I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. (9) Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, And I—in righteousness I will see your face; when I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness.

Ashley got calmed down, and after she made her first bowel movement, we again praised God, knowing she had indeed been healed of the dilated loops of bowels. Kaley, on the other hand came through without any problems and was just quietly getting acquainted with her new world. Jennifer and I were both so relieved, and their birth seemed to really distract her away from the hate she had for me. I also noticed she didn't have any visible regret any more toward the twins, and I even saw her shed a few tears while holding them in the hospital, which was so unlike her.

John 16:21 A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world.

However, we were by no means out of the woods yet. While recovering in the hospital, the nurses saw that the twins would suddenly stop breathing. It was happening to both Ashley and Kaley. It was thought that the part of their brains that regulated breathing hadn't been fully developed yet, since they were born premature, and it would forget to tell them to breath. This was another very scary thing for us to go through, and I began calling upon the name of the Lord for help again. The twins were moved to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, where they had to stay for a full week to be watched. By the end of the week, we were able to go home with the twins each having a breathing monitor that would sound the alarm if they stopped breathing.

I had a few sleepless nights and scary moments at home with the machines, but overall the girls began to recover nicely and within a few weeks, they were able to come off the monitors, and they were now breathing all on their own. By the time this was all done, it had cost us \$100,000 out of our own pocket for the birth of the twins, since we didn't have insurance. I thought that amount was outrageous, but I thanked God that he had blessed our business income, and that we were able to pay those bills. I also believe that God allowed this financial crisis, to restrict how far I could continue to run and grow the business, before He turned me around in a completely different direction.

Pro 19:21 Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails.

Once all the crises were gone, and a sense of normal life started settling in, so did the stress of having five small children. I loved being a Father of twin girls, and I would get lost just looking at them, but as cute as they were, with no nearby family to help, it became an even greater stress while trying to run a growing business, and skating on the thin ice already in the marriage. Jennifer really wanted to work in the business, as opposed to staying home full time with the children, so we decided to hire a part-time nanny to help with the children, while we both worked in the business.

Just two weeks after the twins were born, on **May 15th, 2007**, I received a reply email from Laurie Magers, Zig Ziglar's longtime personal assistant. She wrote that she thought she could finally get some phone time scheduled with Zig and I, in June. Joe Calhoon had made the introduction between Zig and I, through Laurie, about some one on one mentoring. We had been trying to make this happen for many weeks, with back and forth emails to Laurie, but Zig had taken a bad fall down the stairs in his home in March and had ended up with a brain injury and concussion that he was still trying to recover from. I was so excited because I had been hoping for a mentoring relationship like this for years. Here's an excerpt from an email I wrote to Laurie about my motives for having Zig mentor me.

Laurie, I have just contracted with a company on a major project that will likely have my image and my training in front of a few hundred thousand people over the next few years. This is what I call BIG time and I'm not so sure I'm prepared for it. We recently contracted with Joe Calhoon to come in and do a one-year program with us to help us prepare for the business growth, but there are all kinds of other challenges that come along with speaking success and I really want to be prepared for them. I could greatly benefit from Zig's years of wisdom in this area. There have been many great speakers that have fallen victim to success and I want to avoid that at all costs. I have the opportunity to make a huge impact on my world and God is giving me a great deal of favor, but I would love the opportunity to visit with Zig over the phone, or in person, and benefit from his counsel on several things about my business and succeeding for the long haul. Zig will be one of only a hand full of people who would understand what I'm talking about and it would be yet another way for his legacy to continue living on.

I wish I could truly convey how humiliating it is for me to look back on my former life and read emails like this, knowing what I know now about what was really going on in my heart at the time. I was telling myself and Laurie that my main motive for wanting Zig as my mentor was because I felt he was the only one who could understand the dangers of the pride in our profession. I was indeed afraid of becoming prideful, but I had a hidden, an even greater motive for being inside Zig's circle.

I wanted to be associated with him, to make myself feel more respected and important. I felt if I could tell everyone that Zig Ziglar was mentoring me, that would give me the finishing touches on the credibility and approval I still so longed for, especially in the business world. These are the kind of evil, selfish motives, Father was seeing in my very human heart, and why He had so much disciplining to do with me. *My Almighty Father, I deserve eternal death and condemnation for being such a foolish creature. Were it not for your mercy through Jesus Christ, and your wisdom to use Satan to break me from myself, I should be fuel for your eternal fire, which I so aptly deserve! I give you countless thank you's for not giving me what my sins and foolishness deserve.*

Psalm 103:8-10 The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. (9) He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; (10) he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.

Laurie had written me back to let me know that she thought she was going to be able to get my on Zig's schedule soon, but that day never came. By June, I received the news that I wasn't going to be able to get any time with Zig after all. His health had continued to deteriorate after the fall, and he was suffering more and more from short-term memory loss. This dramatically impacted his company and his speaking schedule, as they began to prepare for the inevitable retirement of Zig Ziglar.

I traded many emails back and forth with Laurie at this time, and I sincerely cared about what was happening to my hero, but I am embarrassed to say how disappointed I was for myself. At a time when I should be wanting what is best for Zig and Jean and his family, all I could primarily think about was the crushing disappointment of seeing one of my biggest dreams go right down the drain after getting so close to it. My own selfish ambitions were blinding me to what was more important.

The self-life is a terrible beast, and the cross of Christ was desperately needed in my life to break me free from all this selfish and worldly thinking. I'm not saying that my every heart motive was selfish or rotten. No, it was more like I was a mostly good oatmeal raisin cookie, but with a little bit of dog poop mixed in. I'm sure you would agree that even the very best oatmeal raisin cookie, with a small amount of dog poop mixed in, would be disgusting and inedible. I believe God is so holy that, this is how he sees our "Christianity" when we mix in a little bit of pride, selfishness, hypocrisy, or unbelief, etc.

Galatians 5:9 "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough."

I have heard brother Zac Poonen preach several times that the hardest thing for God to do, on this earth, is to keep a man humble after He blesses him. Even after the Lord's Gym disaster, I was again being defeated by pride in my success, and I didn't need the Lord to tell me then, what I can see so clearly now. If I would have been associated with Zig Ziglar, in any personal way, it would have increased my disgusting pride, not lowered it. The dog poop in my oatmeal cookie was well-hidden to most, but not to God. He could see that I was becoming more prideful all the time, as the business was growing, and as my training was having huge impacts on businesses.

We had started receiving incredible testimonials, comparing my training to the best of the best and several saying mine was the best they ever had. Duffy Stenger, the VP of Regal Boats, after only a few months of use by their dealers, said on video that they had worked with a lot of big-name trainers for their world-wide dealer network, over the years. He then named several of the biggest names in the business, including Tom Hopkins and Zig Ziglar, and then he said, *"Mike Chriswell's training is the best we've ever had, bar none."*

It seems foolish to say this, but I need to make a point here, so you will better understand some things later in the story. Since you can't watch all the video testimonials from my former clients, in this book, I have to testify on my own behalf here. Simply put, I've never been better at anything in this life, than I was in sales and sales training. Without fear of losing a sober estimation of myself, I can say that if Olympic athletes are among the best in the world at their sport, I had become a sales training Olympian. There was an "x" factor to my training, that even my clients had a hard time putting into words, but the sales results were speaking louder than their words, and more and more people were taking notice.

Someone once said, *"nothing in the world happens, until somebody sells something"*, and it's true, especially when you include the sale of ideas, and that made me feel significant as a sales trainer. This had given me justification to pursue more and more success as a speaker and trainer. I finally felt like I was an expert at something that was significant in the eyes of the business world.

However, every time I turned around, there was another opportunity to feed my growing pride monster, which I was trying so hard, as a believer in Christ, to keep in the cage. I hated my pride, and I was afraid of it, but no matter how much I tried to suppress it, or pretended like it wasn't really a problem, it was always right there growing and revealing itself more and more. I didn't realize it yet, but I was powerless to kill this Goliath in my own strength. In His wisdom, God was patiently watching and allowing all of this to happen, so that one day I was going to fall and cry out desperately for His deliverance, from the giant I couldn't deliver myself from.

It was going to be sometime, before I could give much attention to this giant however, because I was still fervently trying to save myself from the every growing and ever demanding tiger I was holding on to. I was so determined to find a way to save myself, that I was about to make some very dramatic and expensive steps in order to do so.

Chapter 15

Determined to Save Myself

As I've been reflecting and writing this autobiography, my wife Persis has heard me lament and groan several times over how foolish my life and so-called faith in Christ was. However, by the time I was done reviewing my old emails from this season of trying to save myself throughout the remainder of 2007 and early 2008, I started weeping so much that Persis got up and came over and held onto me for about 15 minutes, while I cried and tried to explain to her my deep humiliation. It has become one of my great torments, while writing this autobiography, to spend so much time looking back and immersing myself in the muck of who I really was, as a deceived but professing Christian, all while fully believing I was living a life pleasing to God.

I told her, through much sobbing, that it would be so much easier for me if my testimony was full of crimes against men or, pornography addictions, sex with prostitutes, adulteries, drugs, gambling or drunkenness. But the fact that I was claiming to be a blessed child of God, walking in the light, and yet living like a blind fool serving the money and success gods, running here and there chasing deals, and putting all my hope in myself, to save me, makes me feel like a spiritual adulterer and the absolute chief of all fools. Deep humiliation and shame followed looking back on my own words, where God is everywhere in my thoughts and conversations back then, and yet I was so ignorant, and I didn't really know Him any more than I knew the president of the United States.

The more of my emails I read and remembered, the more I felt like there was no way that person could actually be me. It was that similar feeling of disassociation which I had when my mother told me, just before I turned 21, that my father was not my father. Jesus has changed my life and heart so much, that I'm not able to easily reconcile the emails written by *that* Michael Chriswell, with the Michael Chriswell I know today. I told Persis that if I ever start to think too highly of myself, all I will need to do is to remember those last few months of 2007 through early 2008, and I will quickly be back in the dust.

I am able to see another wonderful Romans 8:28 reason why Father asked me to do this writing work. Over the last six years of ministry, I've heard from thousands of struggling Christians, and over time it became easier for me to lose patience with them, because I had forgotten how patient God had to be with me through all my years of half-hearted deception. I have needed to be reminded at a deep level, that I only am what I am, by the grace of Jesus Christ, and apart from him, I am a weak fool destined for destruction. May God grant that I remember that all the days of my life.

John 15:5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

What I found and read in my emails starting in that last quarter of 2007, reads like an exhausting to do list of the worlds' most self-sufficient, fool, who was claiming to be a Christian. If all the details were included, they could easily stand as a book on their own, but here is just a quick summary.

I hired a very expensive outside consultant and then I also hired a business development manager. I applied for a \$100k line of credit. I entertained multiple talks and had several serious meetings about selling the Revelations training business or doing a strategic partnership. I then started putting more and more focus on creating a residual income through multiple subscription based online sales, motivational, and success training projects through my Kickstart productions company. I started focusing on content that could be purchased by large numbers of individuals in business and in sales, rather than me always having to write and produce custom training programs for each client. Convinced this was the right path, I hired a pricey branding company to build an entire new brand from the ground up for Kickstart Productions. I started investing more travel and creativity into the creation of the Kickstart my day daily videos, including doing a few interviews with world champions in the sport of motocross. I started selling private labels of our online training system to other content providers and I had several serious talks with a well-known author,

speaker, and trainer who wanted to partner with me in a very similar way to how I was currently working with our Keypoint client. YouTube had launched the same year I started the company, in 2005, and the interest in online video started to explode. Once we started selling a few private labels of our system to other content creators, I decided we needed to completely redevelop the entire system from the ground up, in order to stay competitive in the rapidly growing online learning space. At the same time, I started planning for other products we could start producing under the Kickstart brand, like Kickstart my Fitness and Kickstart my Faith.

I also partnered with my best friend at the time, who was a graduate of Motorcycle Mechanics Institute, to produce an online motocross maintenance show, which we hoped to monetize through sponsors, so he could be free from a tyrant employer and have his own business. As if all of this wasn't enough, I then started another project called, "Total Life Wisdom", where I began interviewing top local subject matter experts on video, to create another online library of content to sell monthly subscriptions to. I was literally throwing everything I could up against the wall, hoping to create a significant residual income (aka, trusting in the money god) so I could one day let go of the Tiger's tail and rest.

Proverbs 23:4 "Do not wear yourself out to get rich; have the wisdom to show restraint."

Psalms 127:1 "Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain."

There are several emails I found, where I write to friends and colleagues about how much I believe God is opening doors and blessing me during these times. In spite of that fervent belief, all those months of planning and striving and working hard, came to nothing. Basically, every plan I had failed. We didn't finish the program with the consultant. I had to let my newly hired business development manager go after 90 days. I didn't get the \$100k line of credit because I was no longer willing to personally guarantee it, after learning from my mistake with the Lord's gym disaster. I had one business tycoon from our church offer me \$1.2 million for the business, but he wanted to fire all my employees and keep me on a three-year employment contract, so I said no. Every other potential buy-out or strategic partnership we pursued came so close but then didn't pan out. Jennifer disapproved of the work done by the branding company for my Kickstart company, so we fired them. Then we ran into non-stop development challenges on both the Revelations training website and the new subscription sites for Kickstart productions. Plus, I ended up only producing about 5 episodes of the motocross maintenance show before we realized it wasn't going to bring sponsors as fast as we thought. Then, the Total Life Wisdom project got set aside, even after I did tons of work to shoot and produce the training content of about 6 different experts. Not a single thing I was doing to try to fix my life and business was working, and that's exactly what God intended.

Proverbs 19:21 – Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.

A small ray of light

A small ray of light can be found amongst all the self-dependent chaos, in an email I wrote to a friend on October 22nd, 2007. After reading a certain book, I went through a series of thought-provoking questions to help determine what my life mission was and who were the specific people I was here to serve. It was during that time, that I first became fully conscious and began grieving about the fact that, through my businesses, I was teaching people what Paul called, "*the hollow and deceptive philosophies of the world*", rather than the eternal truths of the word of God and Christ. I started to realize at the smallest level, just as Paul warned in 1 Corinthians 3, that my work with people was useless in God's eyes and it would not stand the coming judgment by fire.

1 Corinthians 3:11-13 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. (12) If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, (13) his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work.

Paul mentions gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, as spiritual metaphors, not as actual physical materials. Clearly no one builds on the foundation of Christ, using these literal items. Nevertheless, I used to believe he was referring to the first three as noble and the last three as ignoble, but I was wrong. They are all ignoble in context of what he is teaching. All six are all elements of the earth, harvested, valued, used, and sold by men. Paul means for us to understand that all six of these choices, while valuable or useful in this life, are worthless in the building of God's people and kingdom. Peter makes this even more clear by reminding us that all those elements, which Paul mentioned, are going to burn in the coming fire (2 Peter 3:12).

The only things that will survive the coming judgment of God, are the things built by the Spirit and grace of God, not the clever ideas, resources, psychological principles, philosophies, efforts or strategies of men. Through my sales training and motivational videos, I was helping people build their earthly lives and careers with positive attitudes, anecdotes, success principles, and worldly wisdom. My entire focus was on helping people to make more money and live a great life here. That is not the focus of God's kingdom in the New Covenant. No matter how much I helped a person live a better life here, all that work was going to burn up and prove worthless on the day Christ comes back. None of what I was teaching was helping people to truly become more like Christ. As a professing Christian, I was teaching people how to *find their life* in this world, when Jesus Christ taught the exact opposite.

Matthew 10:38-39 and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. (39) Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

That bold and challenging email I received from my friend Matthew Eldridge, two years earlier, about using my gifts to serve God's eternal kingdom, rather than this temporary life, was now the exact message I was ready to wrestle with. Regardless of how much I loved God and had changed, I was finally starting to see the worthlessness of my work, after all those years of justifying myself as someone who was doing a good thing and helping people better themselves and their family. If my work was carpentry, it would be perfectly ok for me to use the tools of men, but when your work is building up the body of Christ, the tools and philosophies of men, have no place.

Zechariah 4:6 "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty.

After weeks of thinking and praying about my purpose and what I would do with my life if money were of no consequence to me, I wrote the following as a mission statement for my life.

"I am here to inspire and teach God's chosen people to have genuine faith in Him."

Knowing now, how far I was away from that becoming a reality, I am nevertheless amazed at just how accurate of a mission statement it turned out to be, and how many times I held on to it over the coming years. Similar, perhaps, to Joseph's first dreams, I believe this was a God given vision and promise to hold on to in the coming years of affliction and uncertainty.

The desire and vision to use my talents and speaking for God's kingdom, rather than this temporary life, was now fully seeded in my heart, but it was going to remain choked off still for some time, by all the remaining chaos and old attitude of self-sufficiency which was still in my life. God had a lot of work to do

in me before the vision could even start to be fulfilled. Even though my desire was starting to change from the world to God's kingdom, I still thought it was all up to me to make it happen, so I continued on with stubborn determination and optimism that it was all going to work out in the end.

With none of my others plans working out, my only hope was once again set on my Keypoint client. I had been enduring the frustrations of unmet expectations and the growing awkwardness in the relationship because I still had so much hope that they would come through and be my savior from the Tiger. I felt for sure that if I could just endure long enough until they delivered on their end, I would be home free, and I could then start to focus on the spiritual desires of my heart. I did not realize at the time how guilty before God I was of trusting in man and myself, by trying so hard to create my own deliverance. There are many Scriptures that warn about this, but what makes it even more clear is to see a prayer of such humble dependence, like that of King Asa, and then to be able to see that I was still thinking exactly opposite.

2 Chronicles 14:11 NIV [11] Then Asa called to the Lord his God and said, "Lord, there is no one like you to help the powerless against the mighty. Help us, O Lord our God, for we rely on you, and in your name we have come against this vast army. O Lord, you are our God; do not let man prevail against you."

I am also able to see how much I was in violation of another principle found in Isaiah, which warns us against trying to create our own "light" or work a deliverance for ourselves, when we are in the dark regarding our life circumstances. We are to trust in God, and wait patiently for Him, and not to rely on ourselves.

Isaiah 50:10-11 "Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the word of his servant? Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God. But now, all you who light fires and provide yourselves with flaming torches, go, walk in the light of your fires and of the torches you have set ablaze. This is what you shall receive from my hand: You will lie down in torment."

Ironically, I myself, was about to lie down in torment.

December 17th, 2007

I was lying face down in the dirt, groaning out loud in terrible pain, yet barely able to breath. The wind was knocked out of me, and just as I was coming back to reality and processing what had just happened. I could hear my six-year-old son Tyler running towards me and yelling, "Daddy...daddy, are you ok?" I tried to be brave for him, and to not let him know how badly I was hurt, but I knew I was in bad shape and I was not going to just get up and walk away from this on my own. I managed to grumble out, "Daddy had a bad accident son...tell Uncle John (an alias for my best friend at the time), to call an ambulance."

Within moments, the ambulance arrived, and they carefully picked me up off the ground, loaded me into the back on a stretcher, and started cutting off my motocross gear. On the way to the hospital, one of the paramedics saw that my breathing was very rapid and shallow, and with a stern voice he said, "Mr. Chriswell, I need you to calm yourself down and to take some slow deep breaths for me, or you are going to hyperventilate." Fear, pain, and anxiety all cause panicky breathing, which can then lead to all sorts of other troubles.

What a strange irony that moment is to look back on. Perhaps if I would have had spiritual eyes and ears to see and hear back then, I might have heard the Lord speaking into my heart before the accident, "Michael, I need you to calm yourself down and to stop running here and there. You need to learn to rest in me or you are going to spiritually hyperventilate." Mentally, emotionally, and spiritually, I was living in a constant state of anxiety and my breathing in of the Word and Spirit of God was very shallow because I

was totally trusting in myself. When we as Christians do not actively trust in the Lord, then life is dependent on us and that's a good time to be filled with much panic and anxiety, but not when you learn to trust God.

Matthew 11:28-30 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. (29) Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (30) For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

To me it seemed like a freak accident. It had been the very last lap before we packed up and went home from another great day of riding our dirt bikes. I decided to ride one last lap standing up the whole way around, which I would do for practicing balance in our deep Florida sugar sand. I came around a corner which I'd been around countless times, but I had drifted in the sand too far to the right and a thick vine on a large brush area caught on my right handlebar as I was under full acceleration. I was whipped and ejected over the handlebars like I had been shot out of a cannon. I went flying and landed about 20 feet away with my left side taking the full impact face down into the ground. Shortly after the ambulance reached the hospital, the x-rays showed I had broken my left collar bone into three pieces and I had three broken ribs.

Jennifer showed up at the hospital, in complete disgust, treating me like I had just done some terrible evil. Although we had a part-time nanny, all she could think about was how she was going to have to take care of the children while I healed. She wouldn't even touch me, and her eyes were filled with hate towards me as I lay there in agony.

To this day, I describe that day as the day, "*God pushed me off my dirt bike.*" This was the beginning of him intervening in my life to start the process of really frustrating my plans and breaking me. He had already been boxing me in by the squeezing of my circumstances. Now, He had just thrown in a forced period of painful time-out, which was going to help me to feel the squeeze of my own helplessness even more.

I was about to learn just how weak myself and my false gods really were. My dirt bike, which had become my main idol and outlet for stress release, was not going to be able to do anything for me over the next three months, and because the entire company was dependent on me, everything was being delayed, including our income! Just as Father had planned, I became miserable sitting around in that bed, not only from the physical pain of broken bones, but also from the increasing contempt Jennifer was showing me.

Isaiah 38:12-15 Like a shepherd's tent my house has been pulled down and taken from me. ... I waited patiently till dawn, but like a lion he broke all my bones; day and night you made an end of me. (14) I cried...I moaned like a mourning dove. My eyes grew weak as I looked to the heavens. I am troubled; O Lord, come to my aid!" (15) But what can I say? He has spoken to me, and he himself has done this. I will walk humbly all my years because of this anguish of my soul.

Job 5:17-18 "Blessed is the man whom God corrects; so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty. (18) For he wounds, but he also binds up; he injures, but his hands also heal.

Within days of the accident, I made a detailed list of all the things I needed to do to once and for all get back to our original vision, where the only projects we created were of my sales training and the Keypoint project. We let all other potential clients know that we could no longer serve them, because we had changed our business model.

The broken bones and contempt from Jennifer were just the beginning of my pain. I had delayed going to the Orthopedic doctor, instead, laying around and hoping my collar bone would heal on its own. It was healing, but with a bad deformity. Upon x-rays at the doctor, he exclaimed, "*Why in the world did you wait for two weeks to come see me...now we are going to have to re-break it.*" I was scheduled for surgery the

next week, where they re-broke the collar bone and plated it with hardware and screws. This put me back in bed again, so I could recover a second time. While recovering this time, the bottom fell out of the one basket I had just put all my eggs into. The Mormon owners of Keypoint confessed they had ran out of money, whereupon it soon came to light that they had been lying to us and to potential investors.

I knew they had been looking for a large investor for many months. However, when they approached the investors, they were all reluctant to fund their company because the investors realized that I was not a part owner in their company, even though I was the main ingredient in their pie. I owned the technology, the production company, I was the camera talent, and I was writing most of the content. The investors realized that if anything happened to me, or if I left, the whole project would be bust.

Finally, it made sense to me why Keypoint had made such a desperate and inappropriate attempt to buy a controlling ownership of my Kickstart Productions company. Months earlier, they had created a brochure, lying to potential investors, telling them that I was indeed a minority partner/owner in their company.

This was the straw that broke the camel's back and the blow that left me totally mentally paralyzed. I no longer had any mental energy to try to save myself. I sat around as if enveloped in some sort of a fog. We had about \$150,000 in the bank, and some monthly receivables, but not nearly enough to cover the \$50k a month in expenses.

With the loss of Keypoint and having turned away from much of our other prospective customers, I knew there was not enough income for me to maintain the company for long. I was so upset about the idea of having to let my beloved employees go, and I was so afraid to admit to everyone that I had failed again. The only thing left for me to do in my condition was to go into denial, believing that perhaps God would intervene at the last minute and save it all, but I myself had nothing left in me to fight or start over. Jennifer and I both decided not to tell the employees until we knew for certain that the end had come.

While the ship was slowly sinking, I looked at our accounting and realized that about \$250k of our nearly \$700k in annual revenue that year, had all come from my sales training programs. I quickly surmised that even God didn't intervene with a miracle and save us, that we could still live quite well just working from home. If we had no employees and no overhead and we just focused on selling my online sales training and private labels of our training system for other online content providers, we could do very well.

By February of 2008, I had run out of the \$150k in revenue and the end had come. I sat everyone down and told them the whole story about what had happened and why I had delayed telling them. Everyone was sad, but it was especially hard for my production manager, whom had been with us from the very start and whom I dearly loved and respected. He took it all very personal and was deeply hurt by it. I don't think he ever forgave me for it, and our relationship was never the same after that.

We surrendered our class A office space, sold all our office furnishings, and moved our servers and the rest of the business into our home. Suddenly, with no overhead, we found ourselves doing quite well financially, with about \$13k in monthly revenue still coming in from our ongoing license fees.

The 2008 credit crisis was well underway and the terribly overpriced real estate bubble in Florida was beginning to pop and many people were feeling the effects even indirectly. One day we received a knock on the door from a representative of the bank who held the mortgage on the large house we were renting. We were informed that the owners had been keeping our rent money each month, known as "rent skimming" and not paying their mortgage. They told us the house was in foreclosure and we had perhaps 20 days to get all our possessions out of the house, or we could be in danger of having everything in the house, including all of our business servers and equipment, confiscated permanently by the bank.

We took the warning seriously and made a mad dash to find a new place to live. We weren't able to buy yet because we didn't have a huge down payment anymore, and also because the bubble still hadn't popped. Instead, we found a beautiful home with a gorgeous pool area, in a nice gated community, that we decided to do a lease/purchase option on. The home was stunning and was valued right at a million dollars. It was on a 2-acre lot, with a wooded backyard that led to a private lake. The swimming pool area was \$150,000 and looked like you were at the Ritz Carlton. The home was over 4,000 sq. feet and had a 12-seat movie theater on the second floor. Our three oldest children, Tyler, Chelsea, and Nathan just loved the house and the pool area. They were so excited, and I felt so happy to be moving my family into this amazing house after all the stress we had been under for so long. The owner of the home was a believer in Christ and successful builder in town. He had purchased the home after he went through a divorce but was now selling the home because he and his wife reconciled and got re-married. We both had a lot in common through business experiences and he treated us very graciously. He even found out about my sales training and hired me to come in and do some sales training for his entire team.

After all the stress we had been through with the business, the house felt like an oasis for us, a dream come true. Jennifer became so happy, and immediately began treating me so much better, when she knew we were going to be moving into this house. We moved in and within months, it was like we had a completely different life and marriage. Incidentally, just months after we moved out of the previous house, we got a call from a friend that our old house was on the news. The house was struck by lightning over my son Tyler's room and had caught on fire. We saw that as even more confirmation God had indeed been blessing and moving us. Everything I had been hoping for and dreaming for and working for was finally falling into place.

The three oldest children were attending a wonderful private Christian school, Jennifer was doing all our accounting again, and we were both enjoying working together from this amazing home, with a slimmed down and very simplified business model. I was always home to help her with the children and she was able to come and go anytime, as she needed. Our entire relationship changed, and she started becoming supportive of everything I did, my relationship with my best friend, my dirt bike riding, my relationship with the children, including me getting the three oldest dirt bikes, and she met my desire to do weekly date nights and morning coffee talks with just she and I and the Bible. She even went to a few Supercross races with me and my best friend. She also started doing triathlons and running races and me and the children would go and watch her. She was finally pleasant and happy, and that in turn made me very happy. To my great surprise, she even became much more affectionate and was now regularly interested in physical intimacy.

She had become like a totally different person, and by the end of 2008 we even started planning another business idea together, where we would do small conferences at exotic locations, to help people find and discover their unique life purpose. It became the absolute best year of our entire fourteen-and-a-half-year marriage. I found what I had been hoping for so long, and I think I lived everyday stuck somewhere between amazement and denial because she had changed so much. We spent so much time with our children and we did such fun things with them. We were finally like the perfect family you see on the church Billboards driving down the road, only we were the ones who had to overcome hell to get to that place. One time, I asked her how our marriage was doing on a scale of 1 to 10, and she replied with a confident 10. I could not imagine this person saying something like this, for all those years previous. Another time, she randomly came up to me as I was walking across the living room, stopped me in my tracks, gave me a big hug and a kiss and then told me she was so proud of me and delighted to be my wife. The wife I had married would never do something like that. It felt like God had given me a new wife and a new life. All that hard work felt like it finally paid off.

From as early back as I can remember, I had dreamed of being one of those couples who were still walking hand in hand down the beach, at 80 years old, more in love then, than the day we got married. For the previous 13 years of marriage, that seemed impossible. But, now, based on what we experienced in our marriage in 2008, I was now convinced that dream would one day come true. I was more in love with Jennifer than I had ever been before. We had been through so much hell and overcome so much adversity, that we became an inspiration to several people in their marriage. Jennifer and I even talked about starting to do marriage courses to help others to achieve what we had finally found by persevering.

In my mind, we had finally made it to the part of the story that we all love to hear, *“and they lived happily ever after.”* Once again however, I could not possibly have imagined the onslaught of hell which was just around the corner. Whoever first said it, was right. The truth is oftentimes stranger than fiction and, on that very note, I received a rather timely and tragic call, as I was writing this chapter, which leads me to go back and tell you one additional story from 2007.

The Story of John White

On **August 20th, 2007**, as I was still searching for solutions to my “Tiger by the tail” business problem, I reconnected with one of my old childhood friends whom I had idolized when I was a kid. His name was John White. John was the step-son of my mother’s best friend. His father was an orthodontist and they lived in a large home and enjoyed an upper middle-class lifestyle.

John was about 8 years older than me, and I just thought he was the coolest teenager alive. He was everything I wanted to be plus he was very handsome, super athletic, and the girls swooned over him. He worked out and was really good at tennis, surfing, skateboarding, and even snow skiing. But more importantly, there was a kindness and sweetness about John, that you don’t usually find in men who are that handsome and that talented. He paid attention to me, and took time to teach me things, and he even let me use some of his stuff when I wanted.

Whenever we went to their house, I always wanted to hang around John. He took me to the beach a few times and taught me how to surf better, even letting me use his custom-made Mike Tabeling surfboards. One time, he drove me to the beach at night, just he and I, so I could shoot off some of his fireworks, because he knew I liked them so much. I remember driving to the beach that night in his bright red Volkswagen Cabriolet, with the top down and the stars above, listening to Peter Gabriel songs, thinking this must be the coolest experience a kid could possibly have.

After my parents divorced when I was nine and my mom and I moved to AL, I lost touch with John for many years. Every time my mom talked with her best friend, I would ask how John was doing. He had gone to law school and graduated in the top 1/3 of his class and eventually started his own practice in Central, FL. I knew there was a time when he had made, and then lost, a bunch of money in the stock market, and I also found out he had been struggling terribly with alcoholism. It had gotten so out of hand that he had to go into treatment for it. Along the way, he had lots of pretty girlfriends, but never seemed to be willing to settle down for marriage.

In June of 2007, John had left a large fitness company he had been working for in business development, and he had been looking for something to sink his teeth into, job wise. He was doing well and was free from the alcoholism and was regularly attending AA meetings. It was really exciting for both of us to reconnect, and he said the timing was perfect for him to talk about a work opportunity with me. I told him about all that had changed in my life and business, and about my Christian faith and love for God. He told me that he too was becoming a more spiritual person as a result of his troubles.

He was very interested in working with our company and felt he could really help alleviate some of the stress from the growth pains I was facing in the business, and more importantly he believed he could help me to grow the business in different market segments. John was a very smart guy and I could tell that he understood some things about my business that I didn't. His law practice had been in contract negotiations, so almost immediately, he began giving me feedback and insight about the Keypoint deal, which gave me even more confidence to bring him on board as an employee.

Jennifer and I made him an employment offer on a 90-day trial as a business development manager. It was really exciting to see my childhood hero showing up to our office each day, and I was so happy about him being a part of our company. I think because John came with quite a few new ideas, Jennifer, almost immediately didn't like him, and never had anything good to say about him. I really wanted to share Christ with John and to help him to see that the true living God of the Bible was not simply the "higher power" or "spirituality" he had been taught about in AA meetings. I can't help but believe my witness for Christ with him was hampered, when he began to see the hardness in Jennifer, who also called herself a "Christian".

Nonetheless, John and I started working together on several projects, but as I explained in the last chapter, nothing I was trying was working out. So, by November of 2007, Jennifer concluded that there was not enough ROI for John's position, so she decided we should not continue his employment agreement. I was very sad to see him go, but he had another opportunity pop up right away. He also went to live in Costa Rica for some time and we never really stayed in touch after he left our company.

Tragically, as I was writing this very chapter of my life which he was in, my mom called me and told me that John was just found dead in his home. He had put a gun to his head and pulled the trigger, committing suicide. It was discovered that he was about to lose his business and his home and had been struggling again terribly with alcoholism.

When I first received the news, I went into shock, and then about three days later, while looking at his pictures, the deep mourning and crying came. To look at John's Facebook page, you cannot imagine this person killing himself. On the contrary, you would have concluded that he had the life that most of us only dream of having. He had traveled, surfed, skied and fished in some of the most beautiful places on earth. He had so many friends and I think most of them just adored him. I went into what felt like a depression for over a week, knowing that someone I had looked up to so much as a child, was now in hell separated from God for all of eternity. Someone might say, "*But, Michael, how do you know he is in hell.*" I know it by faith in what the Bible says is true, the same faith which would allow me to know he was in heaven right now, if he had only given his life in full surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ.

John 3:36 "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

John 8:51 "Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he will never see death."

Long gone are the days, where I could deceive myself to find false comfort by saying, "*Well, he is in a better place now.*" That is not what God's word, the Holy Bible, which has been proven true in countless ways in my own life, teaches.

2 Peter 2:4-9 For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment; (5) if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; (6) if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; (7) and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by

the filthy lives of lawless men (8) (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)— (9) if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.

Today, I understand that John would feel a tremendous insult upon hearing the lie that, “*He’s in a better place*”. On the contrary, I intentionally meditated on what it must be like for John to be in such torment at the very moments I was thinking about him and the very moment you read or listen to this. No matter how much I hate the idea of someone going to hell, I cannot deny the very goodness of our eternal and Sovereign God’s judgment. It is a righteous judgment of our God, when he separates for all of eternity those who choose to rebel against His rule in their life, from those who humble themselves before Him and gladly choose His salvation and His Lordship over their lives.

The majority of humans have no idea what a terrible evil it is in God’s eyes, for them not to believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ in such a way that you subject yourself to his rule and authority. A human being has no life and no right to exist apart from the One who created them. What a terrible crime to rebel against your maker and Savior, as we can see from the words of Christ in the following two passages.

Luke 11:23 "He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me, scatters.

Luke 19:27 "But these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them in my presence."

I thought much about John suffering miserably in hell right this second. Even as I write this, he has already been in hell for several weeks suffering indescribable torment, but in the span of eternity, his suffering has only been like the blink of an eye. God is never ending, and so is an eternity spent separated from him.

2 Thessalonians 1: 8-10 - "He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who believed.

As I really thought of his torment in hell, I also thought about the rich man in Luke 16.

Luke 16:23-25 "In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. (24) "And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.' (25) "But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony.

After Abraham tells him that there is no way out and that he is stuck in hell. He begged Abraham to please send someone back from the dead to warn his brothers, so they wouldn’t come to this place of torment he was now in. I know John would give anything to come back and warn those of us who are still living, not to come to this terrible place he is in now in, and that so many don’t even believe exists. Right now, John is in the same exact place as that rich man which Jesus Christ us about two-thousand years ago. John knows that the words of Jesus are true, but now it’s too late for him and there are no second chances. Just as it says in Hebrews 9:27, “*It is appointed for a man to die once and after that to face judgment.*”

Luke 13:22-29 Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. (23) Someone asked him, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" He said to them, (24) "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able

to. (25) *Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Sir, open the door for us.' "But he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you come from.' (26) "Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.' (27) "But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!' (28) "There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out.*

Right now, John White knows better than me, or any other Christian, the real and terrifying meaning of what Jesus said in Matthew 16:26, *“What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?”* Perhaps, by my telling his story here, it will serve as an echo of the warning John is perhaps screaming out in hell right now, *“Please, do not come to this dreadful place of eternal fire and torment. Read the words of God and Jesus Christ in the Holy Bible and please take them seriously before it’s too late!”*

How strangely ironic, that the very words that could have saved John, were written in a book bearing his own name.

John 3:17-21 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. (18) Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. (19) This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. (20) Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. (21) But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

Chapter 16

Wrestling with God’s Call

The way Jennifer was now treating me felt impossible, like a true miracle from God. We had overcome so much adversity, dysfunction, financial failure, several times of each wanting to give up on our marriage, and we had even overcome an affair.

And how very ironic that I would put the finishing touches on this chapter, while sitting at a coffee house, in the very city where that man lives. I must praise God and testify again to His amazing grace right here! Last night at dinner, Persis and I both got tickled like innocent children, over the idea of us running into either him, or them together, while we are in town. I thought about how it would feel and was so blessed to know that because of what Jesus has done in my heart, I could so easily be loving to him, and if there was any remorse on his part at all, I could say in the same spirit of Joseph, *“Do not worry about it, what you meant for evil, God meant for my good. It was not you or her who did this to me, but God. He sent me to that place of trouble so that one day I could help many others who will be there too.”* Oh, my dear brother or sister in Christ, this is the greatest miracle of God on this earth, not the healing of cancer, or tumors, or anything physical in the body, not even the 777-day divorce you will read about in this story, but rather the miracle of forgiveness in the heart, of the seemingly unforgiveable. I lived this story you are about to read, and I have testified to the world in over 300 messages on YouTube about God’s incredible grace, but I sit here this morning, absolutely blown away and amazed all over again, at what God has done

in this sinful and selfish human heart, through Christ Jesus and His love. Oh, my God how I praise you for your indescribable love and mercy.

Back in 2006, I walked into a conference room full of executives at Zimmerman advertising in Fort Lauderdale, FL where I was about to give a sales presentation. The presentation had been delayed by one executive who was running a few minutes late. Minutes later, the doors opened and to my shock I walked Tony Pate. Tony was my former boss while working for that first motivational speaker, who I had left after discovering his lies and adulteries, the same one whom Jennifer had stayed working for, at my displeasure. Tony and I both exploded with shock and excitement to see one another right in front of the whole group. We had an extra special bond because he was the one I wrote about in chapter four, who was with me in the rental car, the day we ended up T-boned by an 18-wheeler on I-95, in Baltimore, MD.

After that meeting, Tony and I met privately, and it was during that conversation that he inadvertently shared some things that ended up confirming my past suspicions that Jennifer had an affair with our former boss. On one hand I felt relieved to know the truth, and on the other hand I was now having to deal with the pain of suspected infidelity all over again.

I waited a few days to calm down, and by the grace of God, I gently confronted her about my meeting with Tony and again about my past suspicions that she had an affair with this man. Immediately she began to deny it. I said, *“Jennifer, Tony told me about the Jacksonville workshop and how he lost a major auto group because they saw a woman that looked just like you coming out of his hotel room. You worked with him at that workshop, and I know it wasn’t someone that looked just like you, it was you.”*

I was willing to live with the fact that she had an affair, I just wanted her to be honest about it, so we could clean the slate and be reconciled. From that experience, I can see why God values this same thing so much. He is more than willing to forgive us our failures, but He demands our honesty and coming clean with him about our sins. After an hour or so, she reluctantly admitted to an emotional affair, but not a physical one. I’ve since come to believe that an emotional affair is even worse than just a physical affair.

I did not believe she was telling me the truth, but I told her that it was simply my gut feeling against her word, and that I was going to just trust what she had told me. I then told her that under no circumstances was she to contact him ever again. A few days later, I saw his number on her phone and found she had called him again. When I asked her why in the world she called him, she said he was coming to town do a workshop and she wanted to confront him and put a stop to the rumors that she had been sleeping around with him like some whore. I again, knew she was lying, but there was nothing I could do. It was such a painful blow to our marriage, and I no longer trusted her. Not being able to trust your spouse is excruciatingly painful. Pretty much all we did from this point forward was fight.

Within just a few months, I was again done and wanted out of the marriage, so I tried again to leave her. It got down to the day I was moving out and I had most of my stuff packed into boxes. Jennifer had left the house for a few hours while I packed and loaded my truck. I felt no regrets or doubts except about missing the children, but I couldn’t wait to finally be free from this woman.

Realizing that I wasn’t changing my mind this time, and perhaps fearing that my leaving the marriage threatened to shatter her image, she came to me in tears just before I finished packing and said very calmly and emphatically, *“I’ve been talking to God, and He told me I needed to forgive you for an affair.”* I was absolutely flabbergasted when those words came out of her mouth. Of all the things she could say, how in the world could she use this false accusation just months after I had confronted her about *her* affair? To me, it felt like she might as well have said, *“I’ve been talking to God, and He told me that I needed to forgive you for being a bank robber.”*

Up to this point in my spiritual life, I had resisted thinking too much about the devil and spiritual warfare. I had some friends early on in my Christian walk who thought the devil was behind every rock, so I ran in the opposite direction, thinking I could just overcome every problem with a positive mental attitude and persistence. However, with this outrageous accusation of adultery, the devil had just shown me his real hand in this whole thing. This was evil manipulation to move the responsibility away from her, and back to me, all so she could once again gain control of the situation and maintain her own image and welfare. I was still her only source of income, and she hadn't worked outside the home since before the Lord's Gym back in 2001.

I have since learned that one of the devil's favorite tactics is to accuse you of something that your accuser is actually the one guilty of doing. Like Joseph and Potiphar's wife, David and King Saul, Samson and Delilah, or Jesus and the Pharisees. Potiphar's wife accused Joseph of sexually pursuing him, when it was her that was pursuing Joseph. King Saul was accusing David of trying to kill him, when in fact it was him who was trying to kill David. Delilah was trying to deceive Samson, all while accusing him of deceiving her. And the Pharisees accused Jesus of being demon possessed, when in fact it was them that were the children of the devil (See John 8:44).

For years, I had tried to get her to see that there was something wrong deep in her heart, from her past, that she wasn't willing to look at or deal with. Now, I was starting to think there was something deeply wrong with *me*, because I had married her in the first place, and because I had stayed this long. Please remember, that was how I felt back in the moment, not today. Today, I continue to be so blessed and amazed and thankful for how Father used the evil in her, to confront all the evil in me. Think of how God used the evil of the Egyptians, the Assyrians, and the Babylonians to confront and root out the evil in the Israelites! Praise God for his wonderful purpose for leaving evil people in the world to discipline and root out the evil from his elect!

At that time, the pain of being falsely accused of the very thing she was guilty of, was excruciating to me. However, with the children in mind, I once again talked myself into staying and swept it all under the rug again. I was still unaware of God's purposeful hand in all of this, or of the fact that he was never going to let me out of this prison until I was so fully broken that I would come crawling to him in the lowest condition and fully ready to surrender. That day hadn't come yet for God, or me, so I continued right on in trying to fix our life and marriage in the hope that one day it would all be better.

This had been one of the darkest seasons of our marriage so far, and that is why it was such a shock and seeming miracle of God, when less than two years after that had all happened, in 2008, she had started treating me with such kindness and affection after we moved into the big house. For her to be able to say that our marriage was a 10, and for me to agree, was just an unthinkable thing, but it happened.

I remember believing so strongly that there was there was absolutely nothing that could come against us or destroy our marriage now. Once again, I was so wrong. This was all just temporary and superficial happiness that was coming from money and better life circumstances, not from fullness and spiritual contentment in Jesus Christ. All the happiness and seemingly answered prayers were short lived, as I soon found myself trapped by a new crisis, a crisis in my heart.

Internal Conflict Regarding My Career

For months, I had still been working hard with a new developer to create a subscription-based website for my sales training which the public could access, but we kept running into one problem after another. We

had a few corporate clients paying us to use the beta version, but those delays gave me lots of time to think again about my desire to serve the Lord and his kingdom, rather than just helping people to make more money. Three times, I felt such a strong conviction to give up my sales training career, and all three times I received incredibly timely contacts from clients which created doubt. They each exclaimed how much they liked my training and how much it was helping the sales people in their life, not just in their income.

Immediately, I found myself doubting the decision about walking away, wondering if perhaps I was being led astray, and that these phone calls were sent by God to keep me from doing something so foolish. After all, I had been in this career for twenty years and we had this expensive lifestyle now which had to be paid for. What a foolish thing it would be to just throw away twenty years of my life after all those years of practicing my craft and making a solid name for myself among some of the best trainers in the world. Would I just walk away from my gift, my talents, two decades of work, my livelihood for the family, or the long-awaited peace and happiness I had finally found in our marriage? I felt a terrible conflict in my heart about what to do, but the conviction of trading in my worthless career, that would count for nothing in the end, for the eternal purpose and work of God's kingdom, just kept coming back.

I still hadn't received a clear call from God saying, "*stop working and follow me*". It was still just the awareness and conviction that my work with people was going to amount to nothing on the day of the Lord. While I wrestled with this matter in my heart, I decided to add some kingdom work on top of my earthly work. I think this was my way of finding some temporary satisfaction for the burden that was growing in me.

Back in 2001, when I had opened The Lord's Gym, I had the opportunity to hear many people's testimonies. One day I realized that it must be one of our biggest sins when we don't tell others what God has done in our life, because it robs him of His glory. I thought about all of God's glory trapped inside so many unknown stories. From that point on, one of the greatest desires of my heart became to tell stories that showcase the evidence of God and His glory.

"I will praise you, O Lord, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonders. I will praise you forever for what you have done. I will come and proclaim your mighty acts, O Sovereign Lord. We give thanks to you, O God, we give thanks, for your Name is near; men tell of your wonderful deeds. Let this be written for a future generation, that a people not yet created may praise the Lord - Psalm 9:1, 52:9, 71:16, 75:1, 102:18

This is when I decided to create a short video to tell the story of an amazingly Divine encounter I had back in December of 2007. Our business finances were strong, and I wanted to give back and help someone for the upcoming Christmas season. This was back before I had light on the true pagan origins of Christmas and Easter. I encourage you to do your own research on this if you haven't already, and I recommend visiting www.CFCIndia.com and reading the wonderful articles brother Zac Poonen has written on the Pagan roots of Easter and Christmas, as well as listen to the full-length message I made on YouTube entitled "*Why Some Christians DO NOT Celebrate Christmas*".

Nevertheless, at that time, I wanted people to hear what God had done in this incredible story, where I went on Craigslist to buy a silly Yamaha motorcycle banner for my garage and ending up having an extraordinary encounter. That was the day I met C.J. McGehee, and his mother Sandra, who were both stuck in a small apartment fighting for his life without any local friends, family or money. C.J. was only fifteen years old and had one of the rarest tumors in the world, which they had been fighting for nine years. Sandra had lost her husband, her home, her job and all her money while desperately trying to keep C.J. alive all those years, traveling anywhere she could find a doctor who would try to help C.J.

He had been through multiple surgeries and chemo treatments. The tumor had tentacles like an octopus and had pushed his heart all the way to the other side of his chest. When I met them, he was in recovery and was living more and more like a normal teenager, but he was anything but normal in his heart. This young man had such courage and faith like I had never seen from someone who had been through so much. The Spirit of Christ was indeed living in this young man's heart. One time I asked him if he ever felt sorry for himself and he said, *"no not really...why not me? If it didn't happen to me, it might have happened to someone else like my mom or brothers...so why not me?"* I was amazed.

I found out they had no money for the upcoming Christmas and were barely with enough food. I had just sold something, and all the cash was still in my truck, so I went out and gave it to them for food and then began thinking about how to provide him and his mother a nice Christmas. One of my clients was Regal Boats, headquartered in Orlando, FL. I was speaking at their annual sales conference and during my talk I was moved to share the story about C.J. and his mom. At the end of my talk, they all came up and filled my camera bag with cash for C.J. and his mom. I was so blessed by their support!

A few days before Christmas all my employees, including Jennifer and I went to their house to meet them and film the whole thing. We were all so excited and blessed to be able to help someone personally, rather than just giving the money to a large unknown charity. It was a beautiful day with them and it just felt like the smile of God was upon all of it. They were so thankful, and Sandra was in tears of joy most of the time. No one had any idea that this would be C.J.'s last Christmas. Within months the tumor had come back so strong that it was now cutting off his esophagus and he could no longer eat. There was nothing they could do and on September 15th, 2008, he passed away, but in heavenly fashion.

I was always worried about Sandra, as was everyone, especially C.J. We didn't think she would want to live after fighting this hard for him and not only losing him, but by the time she was at the end of this battle, she had so many health issues of her own, that she too was now living from hospital visit to hospital visit...a rare blood cancer, strange heart issues, MRSA, and several other complications. The amount of suffering this dear sister in the Lord had gone through was staggering and yet she was still clinging strongly to her faith and hope in Christ through it all. I was so proud to meet someone like her. She was in so much pain and had suffered so much, but she refused to grumble against God or to distrust His Sovereign plan. He was her everything! She had given everything she had to save her child and he was a very big part of her heart and life. God knew she loved that boy so much, and He knew she was going to have a very difficult time, so He did something spectacular!

The morning of the day he was to pass away, one of his older brothers had come in to check on him and leaned down to listen to his breathing while he slept. When he left the room, he asked Sandra, *"Mom, did you give C.J. fresh berries to eat this morning?"* She said no, he hasn't eaten anything this morning. The room was filled with something like the smell of fresh sweet berries and they couldn't understand where the smell was coming from.

Several hours later, he was awake, and they were in his room, when suddenly, even in his terrible weak state, C.J. brightened up, leaned forward and began to drum on himself like he was keeping in rhythm with some music. He said, *"Do you hear that music?"* Sandra couldn't hear it, but C.J. sure could.

Soon, he began looking up towards the ceiling in his room like he was looking at someone. They sat and watched him. After a few minutes, C.J. put his hand up towards the place he was looking at and said, *"no...I am not giving up...I said I would never give up."* Sandra realized he must have been talking to angels. She started to cry because she knew what this meant, but she said, *"Oh honey, it's ok. You aren't quitting son. You fought so hard and so long...you have such great courage...honey if they are here to take you...you can go and be with God now C.J."* C.J. seems to have heard several previous warnings from God, or the

angels, about suicide and so he made his mom promise that she wouldn't do anything to herself so that they could be together again in heaven.

There are many Scriptures in the Bible that led me personally to teach that a person cannot take their own life and still go to heaven. Suicide is the sin of self-murder, and you cannot ask for forgiveness for your sins after you die (See Hebrews 9:12). What the Lord does with young children, or mentally ill persons who take their life is not for me to know, but please do not think you can, sound of mind, choose to take your own life and still go to heaven. The devil comes to steal, kill, and destroy and when he succeeds in assaulting a person's mind into taking their own life, it's not so he can fast track another person into the arms of Christ in heaven. There is nothing in the Bible that comes even close to suggesting that you can murder yourself and be counted among the faithful saints in heaven. On the contrary, please understand that suicide is the ultimate act of unbelief and lack of faith in God, which shows contempt for Him, His goodness, and his ownership of the Christian who was purchased at the price of Christ's shed blood.

It's hard to hear and accept as truth, but the Bible is so clear and even if you just look at what happened to the hundreds of thousands of Jews who were not allowed into the Promised Land because they were talked into unbelief by the ten spies. Can you imagine how many people the devil talks into unbelief? The Bible teaches that you cannot shrink back from faith in Christ and still be with him in heaven. You cannot throw away what Christ purchased on the cross, trampling the grace He has bestowed upon you, and still think you can please God enough to enter eternal life. We must remember that God does not show favoritism or make exceptions.

Romans 11:19-22 You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." (20) Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. (21) For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either. (22) Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off.

Jesus said we must be an overcomer all the way to the end if we want to enter life. To make the truth on this so clear for you, try to read the following Scriptures and then say after each one, "But, I can still commit suicide and go to heaven." The contradiction of the truth will be very clear, if you are someone who loves the actual truth, rather than what we sometimes want to be the truth. Psalm 78:18-22, Matthew 10:22, 10:33, 24:13, Luke 8:13, Luke 14:29-30, Romans 11:20-22, 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, 6:19-20, 15:2, 2 Corinthians 1:8-9, Colossians 1:22-23, Galatians 6:7-9, Hebrews 3:6, 3:14-15, 3:18-19, 10:37-39, 11:6, 1 Timothy 1:19, 2 Timothy 2:4, 4:7-8 1 John 2:24-25, Revelation 2:10-11, 21:8.

If one of my own children commits suicide after they reach the age of accountability, which the Bible defines by when the child knows the difference between right and wrong, not by a certain age, then I have no biblical expectation for them to spend eternity with me in heaven, even if they became a true follower of Christ. (See Deuteronomy 1:39 and Isaiah 7:15-16) This of course is assuming that I too endure all the way to the end, holding on to my faith and hope in Christ, otherwise I will not make it either. The Bible is crystal clear on this for those who love the truth and have ears to hear. This is exactly why Paul says for us to not be arrogant, but to be afraid.

Knowing what C.J. had heard from God or the angels, (multiple times according to the family) he made Sandy promise that she would not do anything to harm herself after he was gone. She promised him that she wouldn't take her own life but said that she was going to miss him deeply. Finally, the time came for him to go and his one brother was leaning over him. C.J. motioned for him to lean back away from him, and then he looked up where he had seen and heard the angels and said in a frail voice, "I can't come to

you, but at least I can sit up for you.” He slowly raised himself up, stretched out his arms and immediately passed away, leaving his body behind, and stepping into eternal bliss with the Lord Jesus Christ.

C.J. and Sandra had such a huge impact on me. Their courage and faith to go through that much suffering and to still be loving and trusting God was beyond just admirable. I had no training in telling stories and I barely knew how to do basic video editing, but I wanted to find a way to tell this story to encourage others.

I finished the story and put it on Vimeo on December 3rd, 2008. The story came out so beautiful and I was amazed. When the story was finished, Jennifer, of all people, suggested we submit it for the 2009 Telly Awards, which is like the Emmy’s for TV production and online video production houses. This was my very first ever production of a story video and to my amazement, it won four silver Telly awards.

C.J.’s story led me to start a website where I could start producing and compiling other God stories. I wouldn’t know it for several more years, but that in turn became the foundation of what would ultimately become RelentlessHeart.com, a ministry where God called me primarily to tell the incredible stories of all that He has done in my life, and how He has had mercy on me. But this wouldn’t happen until the bottom dropped out completely and I went through about four more years of terrible affliction and darkness which were to be my training for this ministry.

The reaction to the CJ story gave me the confidence and increased my desire to tell other God stories and testimonies that would bring him glory. However, since the work was for free, Jennifer became increasingly upset and pressured me more and more to continue working on and building up my training business.

The conflict in my heart between my worthless secular work in sales training and my desire to work for God’s kingdom was in full swing and Jennifer’s anger was also growing. It’s was sometime around this same time when I went into my local Starbucks in Avalon park, FL and my order total came to \$6.66. It was eerie, but myself and the barista laughed it off as I asked her if she could please overcharge me for a different amount. I had seen the number once or twice every year or so, just like everyone else, but from this point forward it started popping up far more than usual. I became intimidated, and since there was so much trouble in the marriage, I thought Satan was really harassing me.

Our income continued to dwindle as the 2008 credit crises impacted more and more businesses. All that peace I had been enjoying in our marriage was now gone and Jennifer went right back to the same old angry manipulation and control of me. We started fighting about money all over again. I continued to think about how I could serve God’s kingdom, provide for my family, and keep the peace in my marriage. I even sold my favorite vehicle which I ever owned, my Toyota Tacoma truck. She had hated that thing every day since I had her co-sign with me to buy it. Now, I was ready to do anything to try to keep her happy again.

In January of 2009, I was contacted by a successful Christian sales trainer and author, who I had actually wanted to meet years earlier. He had seen the C.J. story and called to congratulate me on the work. As we talked, he learned of my online training system and soon he became interested in it for his own training. In February, he invited me to attend a business meeting in the rainforest of Panama Central America, so he could show the technology to his associates. He had written a book about business strategies using the rainforest as a metaphor for business success. Ironically, Zig Ziglar had also written the forward for his book. If I made the sale, this would be some much-needed income for us, \$50,000 for the license of the technology, plus thousands in video production. Once again, my focus was right back on money to save our marriage and maintain our lifestyle.

I wanted Jennifer to come with me on the trip, especially as a good distraction from all her anger towards me, but we couldn’t really afford for either of us to go. Nevertheless, the client was insistent that I try to

be there, and that doing so would increase our chances of closing the sale. My friend Larry Smith was also going so I went ahead and decided I would go and we could split some costs on the trip. Jennifer felt I was again going on a vacation while she stayed home with the children and she was once again filled with poisonous hate and bitterness for me. I walked out of the house so discouraged and I went for the first time into our backyard woods to pray.

After how wonderful our marriage had been in late 2008, I cried out to God in such pain and frustration about what in the world was going on. I felt like I couldn't win. First, she was mad at me because I was doing free video work for the kingdom of God, and now I was trying hard to make a big sale to please her but because it was in some exotic place that she wasn't getting to go to, she was mad as hell again. As I was walking through the woods, humbled and needy, I heard the Spirit speak these words to my spirit, *"I am about to teach you about a part of life which you cannot see with your eyes. It is an invisible battle, and you cannot win it with a positive mental attitude."* Instantly, I knew that God was speaking to me about spiritual warfare, the topic I had so often avoided in my Christianity.

I hoped after prayer that things would calm down, but Jennifer got even angrier. By the time it came for me to leave, she refused even to take me to the airport and I had to call one of my friends to take me. As I boarded the plane, it was exciting to become the minority for the very first time in my life. Larry and I were the only two white people on the entire plane, and the excitement of this trip to Central America quickly became a good distraction away from the craziness I had just left behind. Waiting for me in the rainforest, was a warning about the spiritual warfare that was about to come against me, a dramatic word from God through two different people about my future ministry impact, and the doorway to the greatest temptation and test of my life so far.

Chapter 17

Warfare, Prophecy, and Temptation in the Rainforest

Although we stayed at a nice resort, two of our days, were spent going deep into the rainforest, through miles of winding waterways in long dugout canoes, and hiking up steep and narrow trails behind our barefoot Indian guides. By boat, we arrived on the shore of a primitive native Indian village where the villagers came out to greet us and sing for us. It was extraordinary to see in real life, what I had only ever seen on a BBC documentary. They lived in Bamboo stick homes, high off the ground, with thatch roofs and many of the women were still walking around topless, carrying small children under their arms like surfboards. The little children were all naked and jumping around and swimming in the murkiest of waters, by a dugout canoe, near the shore. I couldn't help but notice their fearlessness, in a place where I knew there must have been alligators living. The locals made some delicious fish and fruit for us, which we ate out of large leaves which they had folded so neatly into a sort of cone shaped cup. The trip turned out to be truly an incredible experience for me, and not just because of the exotic landscape and experiences.

The second night we were there, I had a very vivid and unusual dream. I rarely have dreams that are anything more than nonsense from my own imagination, but I sensed immediately that this dream was from God. Unlike any dream I've ever had, this dream happened in three separate, but connected and unfinished scenes one right after another.

Part 1

I'm walking up to the door of a condominium, where I live. I see some tools sitting by the door, where someone has used them to break in. As I get closer, I can see that the door is standing open about 8 to 12 inches. I peak around the open door and see that it's my neighbor who is a drug addicted junkie. I see these CAT5 cables connected via splices to my internet jacks. He had removed the wall jack plate and connected his own wires. The wires he connected were running through the living room and out of my sliding glass doors. He was trying to steal my internet connection by hiding the cable under the carpet, so I would never know about it. Once I realized what he was doing, I went in to confront him and we begin having a physical altercation. I realize that if he gets a chance, he will hurt me badly or even kill me. While wrestling, I take one of his screw drivers and start stabbing him over and over and over in the chest, but it doesn't really seem to do anything to him. He's not even hurt by it, and he has no blood coming out from the wounds. Although the stabbings weren't very effective, and he doesn't seem to be hurt, I'm still able to overpower him and wrestle him to the ground and get him subdued long enough to call the police to have him arrested. As soon as they start coming down the hallway to pick him up, the dream changes immediately to part 2.

Part 2

I'm now outside by the pool area, enjoying a gorgeous blue-sky day, trying to rest up from that terrible altercation. I'm sitting in a lounge chair, slightly leaned back, when suddenly, this guy's girlfriend, who is now seeking revenge, comes up behind me and puts me in a headlock and sticks a garden hose in my mouth. The hose is wide open, and my cheeks feel like they will burst as she is trying to drown me. However, with what seems like a strange calm, I do not panic because I got a deep breath of air before she put it in my mouth. I know that I'm able to hold my breath for a long time, and that she will run out of strength in her arm trying to hold me in a headlock before I run out of breath. I feel certain that I will be able to overpower her and free myself before I run out of air. She has short jet-black hair, cut like a guy. This part ends before I am free from her headlock and immediately part 3 begins.

Part 3

I'm in a large Home Improvement store with 14 of my friends. We are walking down the large aisle that runs perpendicular to the other aisles and which cuts the store from front to back, when suddenly, this very large, GIANT of a man, comes walking around the corner with a saw blade in his hands. This man is about 6'6 to 6'8 and probably weighs 350lbs. He has a long scruffy beard and looks like he would be the leader for the Hell's Angels motorcycle group. I recognize him instantly as the father of my neighbor, the junkie. He's walking towards me with the saw, and he's acting like he wants to talk about it, as evidence in the court case coming up against his son. However, I know that he is lying and that he really intends to kill me. He keeps walking towards me and I start speaking very loudly and authoritatively for him to leave me alone, to the leave the store saying, "*You have no business here...this has nothing to do with you...leave!*". He continues approaching me slowly and ominously ignoring all my words. I now know there is no escaping a confrontation and I quickly begin looking to my left and right, surveying my friends and their strength. I start feeling confident, as I see that three of my friends are quite muscular and strong and I then know that we can overpower this man. Seconds later, without me doing anything at all, all my friends jumped forward at the exact same time and tackled this large man. I had not part in the battle at all. They end up binding him up and sticking him in a large crate sized box. Then, me and a few others start pushing the box with him in it, across the Floor, to get him out of the store. It is extremely heavy, and we can only slowly move it, but we are, and then the dream ends.

I wasn't sure what the dream meant at the time, but I felt confident after the Spirit had just spoken to me back home about spiritual warfare, that the biker guy must have represented Satan and served as a warning

that he was coming after me. It was going to be another 17 months, before I would realize how prophetic this dream was, even down to the exact number of 14 friends in the dream.

Then, on the last night of the trip, all forty of us met for dinner right on the historic Panama Canal, where the huge cargo ships pass right by the outside seating at the restaurant. During dinner, there were three older ladies sitting directly across from Larry and I, and I could tell that these women were much further ahead in their relationship with God than I was. I was not yet enjoying God's personal guidance and daily presence as I do today. One of these ladies was an attorney from Panama City Beach, FL, and after asking my permission to share, she said in a very matter of fact tone, *"Michael, God is going to use you to touch millions of people's lives for His kingdom, but there's something important he needs you to learn and understand first."*

The two ladies she was sitting with, showed their immediate agreement with her words. Naturally, I was excited about what she said, but I remained reserved, feeling even a bit skeptical, because I did not know who this lady was, or if she was legitimately hearing from God. Perhaps she was just saying this because she was impressed with my talk or because she wanted to be known as a "prophet" who speaks for God. There are many people who get carried away in their own ego and emotions, telling others, *"God told me to tell you....this or that,"* when it's really just their own corrupt imaginations speaking. I cannot remember an exact time or example, but I have no doubt, that even I have done this before.

But then, she went on to say, *"Michael, your whole life you have been thinking about the outcome. You don't do anything without first thinking about the results. God would have you learn to become obedience based in your thinking and leave the outcomes to him."* At hearing this, I broke down right there at the dinner table and started to weep in front of them all, because now I knew for a fact that God was confirming a very specific word to me through this godly woman. Unknown to her, this subject had first come to my attention back in January of 2008, when I started noticing that God appeared to be speaking to me and confirming His words to me through a daily devotional I was subscribed to.

On Monday January 14th, 2008, I received in my inbox a remarkably timely devotional entitled "Move On" and the verse that day was Exodus 14:15 which reads ... *"Why are you crying out to Me? Tell the Israelites to move on."* Incredibly, this was the same verse that our pastor had preached on the day before in church, and this when I was just sitting around waiting for the end to come with Revelations and not knowing what I should do. I knew God was telling me to move forward with downsizing the business and to stop sitting around sulking, waiting for a miracle that wouldn't come.

The very next day's devotional was entitled, "Obedience-Based Decisions Versus Skill and Ability". At that time, my skills and ability in sales and my always being focused on the outcome, were still getting in the way of me simply learning to trust and obey God, no matter what He said. Since the time that devotional came in, my friend Larry Smith and I had both talked about this subject several times, and it had just come up again as a hot topic for me, just before I came on this trip. Now, here I was sitting in front of a godly woman whom I barely knew, and she was confirming this exact same message. I knew this was no coincidence.

Oh, how I wish I could remember her name and get in touch with her to edify the prophetic words the Holy Spirit spoke to me through her that night. I would like to thank her for being so bold and risky to share the dramatic word the Lord spoke to her for me that night, in front of many others. Indeed, the Father did not let any of her words fall to the ground. As I write this chapter my YouTube channel has almost 7,500,000 video views. Incredibly, this has been done without any promotional efforts, without using any of the tactics or tricks so often used by YouTube creators, without any marketing efforts, or any clever keyword tricks whatsoever. And, despite never begging for likes or subscribers in my videos, despite not using tons

of linked videos, and despite not even appearing in most of my own YouTube videos, other than by voice, the channel is fast approaching 70k subscribers in only two and a half years.

Someone recently asked me how to gain subscribers on their channel and how I get people to watch my videos thousands of times. The answer is, I simply did exactly what Father asked me to do, and then I patiently trusted Him through prayer and faith alone. I applied the very principle that lady in the rainforest told me that Father wanted me to learn, to make all my decisions based on obedience and to leave all the results to Him.

A faithful servant of the Lord can rest assured that if God wants to fund or promote you or your ministry, He absolutely will, without you having to do anything other than obey what He tells you to do. George Muller and Hudson Taylor both lived by this principle, "*Seek first the kingdom of God, not the means to advance it.*" Like George Muller and Hudson Taylor, I too have a "money box" (a donate button) because there must be a way for us to receive the funds that Lord moves on people's hearts to give, but also like those faithful servants of God, I never ask for donations and I make my financial needs known only to God. If nothing else, by God's grace, I want my life to be yet another proof that the faithful God can be trusted through prayer and faith alone, by those who obey His commands and do what pleases Him. As you continue in this story, you will see example after example of how I have never once been disappointed or put to shame by trusting God like this.

Back to the dinner table in Panama. In my peripheral vision, I had seen another man a few seats away, turned backwards from his dinner table, patiently waiting to speak with me. Having not heard what this first woman said to me, this man shocked me by saying nearly the exact same thing. Despite all the turmoil waiting for me back at home in the marriage, I was so encouraged because I knew God was speaking to me loud and clear. When I look back on this, I can see that this message on obedience-based thinking begins to set in motion the promise which was given to me back in 2002, when that lady/angel said, "*God will be magnified and glorified through your obedience.*"

I am able to look back from here and see why Satan was fighting so hard through the antagonism of Jennifer to try to stop me from taking this trip. So far, I had had the most remarkable prophetic dream I'd ever had, which was warning me of great spiritual warfare that was coming against me. Then I had a most encouraging prophetic word spoken to me about God using me in the future to impact millions for the kingdom of God, plus an incredible confirmation of a word from God, regarding obedience, which I was to focus on.

After all these, there was one more very unexpected experience waiting for me, and it's an experience which was first shared by our Lord. Right after Jesus was publicly anointed for ministry, and right after God publicly acknowledged Him in an audible voice from heaven (Mat 3:13-17), the Holy Spirit then led Jesus immediately into the wilderness, to face his toughest temptations from Satan. In Matthew chapter four, we see first that Satan tempts Jesus to supply his own need for food, then to gain followers and fame by throwing himself off the temple, where it would have been publicly seen that God's angels would have saved him.

Finally, Satan tempts him to gain the authority over all the kingdoms of the earth by simply bowing down to him. God had already prophesied in the Old Covenant that Jesus was going to be given all three of these things, but in His timing. Now, here comes Satan to test him with a shortcut to His desires and God's promises. Satan is tempting Jesus to skip the waiting and pain of 3.5 years of humble ministry, discipline, suffering, persecution, and finally the cross. Instead, Satan is essentially saying to Jesus, "*There is no need to wait, and no need go through all of that, when you can have it right now!*" I once heard a man of God say, "*Many times, just before God opens a door in your life, the devil will come and throw a trap door right*

in front of it.” No servant is greater than his Master. Like our Lord, I too was fresh off receiving a public word from God, and being told I was going to be anointed for a significant impact in ministry, and like our Lord, I too was about to face my largest temptation ever.

I had still been undecided about whether to walk away from my sales training career or not. Unknown to me, there was a man in the audience during one of my presentations in Panama, who had been doing some research on me and my sales training programs. He found out about me through the host of the meeting, who was a friend of his.

He approached me after I spoke at one of the meetings and said he wanted to know if I’d be interested in meeting with him about a serious opportunity, once we got back to the US. His credentials were strong, and I was assured by the host of the meeting, that this was indeed a legitimate once in a lifetime opportunity. However, he couldn’t tell me more until we got back to the States and I had signed a non-disclosure agreement. I spent the next three days with this man in the jungle and really enjoyed getting to know him. He was very likeable, and we had a great deal in common, including lots of children, previous business failures, and most importantly our faith in Jesus Christ. We hit it off immediately.

After making it through a few difficult weeks with Jennifer back at home, she agreed to come with me to hear about this opportunity, after I reminded her of all the pressure, she had been putting on me to build up my speaking career. We arrived at his beautiful home right on Tampa Bay, where after a few hours of small talk around the pool, the wives went into the kitchen and he and I went to his home office, which was the size of a small home. That’s when he said, *“Ok, Mike, let’s talk business...perhaps this is what God has been preparing you for your entire life. Opportunities like this don’t just get offered to anyone, but before I can tell you, I need you to sign this five-year non-disclosure agreement we talked about.”*

He pushed it forward and that’s when I saw it was on behalf of Peter Lowe and Get Motivated Seminars, the largest seminar company in the world. They put on large business seminars around the country with some of the top business and political leaders in the world. After I signed the agreement, which is now expired, he explained that they were interested in me replacing a well-known sales trainer on the circuit, who was getting older. To my shock, he told me it was Tom Hopkins, the trainer of sales champions, that they wanted me to replace. This was the man I had promoted years earlier as a National Sales Trainer, working for one of his promoters. It felt like they were wanting me to replace my old boss.

He went on to say that they also realized that of the 300,000 people attending their seminars annually, nearly 150,000 were sales people and they were looking for a new product to offer them. When they looked at my Kickstart My Sales online training, and the results my clients were getting with it, they concluded it was exactly what they were looking for. He explained to me that I would become a household name in the United States business world in one year, sharing the platform with the most recognizable names in business leadership, people like Tony Robbins. They had statistics from 20 years in their business and they already knew how much they would sell the monthly subscription for, how many people would take a trial, how many would sign-up as a paid customer, and how many months the paid customers would continue with the program. When he showed me my portion of the projected revenue share, it was a very high six-figure fee per seminar. I was astounded and afraid all at the same time. This was bigger than big time. I told him that I really appreciated their interest and the offer, and that I would pray about it and let them know something soon.

On the way back home to Orlando, my mind was in full brainstorm mode as I talked with Jennifer about this. I was afraid because of the size of the opportunity, but I began wondering if this might truly be an open door from God, perhaps the greatest in my life. I wondered further...couldn’t this be the ultimate redemption of all that failure? Hadn’t I been trying to prove my value to Jennifer all these years and now

one of the largest success companies in the world wants me to be on their team? Didn't that lady just tell me in Panama that I'm going to touch millions of lives for Christ? Maybe that's because I'm supposed to share my faith on that business stage.

I thought to myself, *"Has it not been my desire for so long to get back to strictly doing sales training, the one thing I'm an expert at? Had not several of my clients compared my sales training with the best of the best?"* I continued wondering; was it just a coincidence that several of my clients felt I was going to be the next Zig Ziglar, and that Zig became famous through Get Motivated Seminars? Was it a coincidence that he had just had a head injury in 2007 which was now preventing him from speaking for them? Was it also just a coincidence that I had met Peter Lowe at Zig's 80th birthday party? The answers to these questions were making a very strong case that I just needed to have the courage to step into this opportunity and take it. After all, this opportunity showed up right when I was in such need. I wasn't wise enough at the time to think or ask, *"When did Jesus' greatest temptation come?"* It came at his most desperate time of need.

Despite all the pressure she had put on me in the last few months about building up my sales training and speaking business, from the minute we left their house, Jennifer stood strongly against this. I was surprised at first, but then I wasn't because this was the kind of hypocrisy I was used to seeing in her. I have come to see that Pharisees desire power and control over people even more than they want material prosperity. I believe she felt threatened by the size of this opportunity and that she realized this was going to remove all her ability to control me. Get motivated seminars would now own me, not her. She too loved money and had a high level of ambition for our obnoxious lifestyle, but even more important to her than material possessions, was maintaining her power and control of me.

Unknown to me, in her attempts to stop this, she went online and found some accusations against one of the guys from a past business failure, and then used this to justify standing against the whole opportunity. Get Motivated Seminars is still running strong all these years later. She began treating this gentleman, and my client who introduced us to him, with such rudeness that my client later called me to say he had never had anyone talk to him, in all his years of business, as rudely as she had just done so.

I can see, looking back, that just like my dirt bike accident came from God, so did her hard heart that was once again standing against me. I was willing to make the decision apart from her liking, but I believe He was using her to hold back the horse in my heart and to give me some more time to slow down and think before I started running with this. I wrestled with this decision like few others because I felt the weight and future consequences of this decision could not be calculated. I didn't know which way to go yet, but it was like God was drawing a line in the sand of my life, and I knew my life was going to be changed forever, regardless of which path I took.

Part of me was afraid to even ask God directly about this, in case he said no. I had wanted to prove I was a success for all those years and here was my big chance. Finally, I became so exhausted from all the brainstorming and fears of making a mistake that I finally begged Father to please let me know what He thought about this. It was late in April 2009, while sitting on our porch, when the answer came suddenly to my spirit. *"If you say yes to this, it will be the death of you, and you will no longer be useful to me."* He wasn't speaking of my physical death, but rather of my spiritual death, which is the far more important death in the New Covenant. Jesus first points out this new type of spiritual death in John 8:22, when he tells a man whose father has died, instead of going to the funeral, to come follow him and let the "dead bury their own dead." (See also John 5:24, 6:63, James 2:26, 1 Tim 5:6).

As I meditated on what I had just heard in my spirit, soon came this additional insight as if God was saying, *"You will become one of those professional speakers who stands on the broken glass of their own life, while telling others how to successfully live theirs."* I knew exactly what He was talking about because I had

already been around some of the most successful business leaders and speakers, and I had seen with my own eyes what the inside of many of their money loving lives looked like. Spiritual death is a good description.

Jesus taught us the importance of partnering with God's will through our own human choice in John 7:17, when he said, "*If anyone chooses to do God's will*". I can see that God was giving me insight, but still allowing me to choose, and that He wasn't going to close the door if I wanted to step into it, but I now knew exactly what the warning was. I would be destroyed by my pride, and I did not have the character to be able to handle that kind of money or fame. I would have been consumed by it, and no longer useful to the kingdom of God and Christ, who died for me. Instead, I would be spiritually dead to God.

I was hungry enough spiritually that I was now more afraid of losing God, and His best for my life, than I was in missing this *once in a lifetime* opportunity. Once I made the decision, I sent the email letting them know that I very much appreciated the offer, but that I felt God was calling me in a different direction. I think that because Jennifer felt I was siding with her in such a major issue, that her fears of losing control over me subsided and once again there was temporary peace in the marriage.

However, I did not make that decision for her, but for God and it became a defining moment in my future walk with Him. It was one of the first times I had heard and consciously yielded to doing His costly will in something. He perhaps helped me more than I should have needed His help, by making me afraid of what would happen to me spiritually if I took the job, but nevertheless, I chose to do His will in this part of my life. In that moment, I broke the lifelong pattern of making outcome-based decisions and instead chose to obey the wisdom and will of God. It also broke the pattern of being deceived into thinking I was doing God's will simply by following opened and closed doors in my life. As we can see in Matthew chapter four, the biggest three "doors" which were initially opened in Christ's life were opened by the devil, not by God. Despite what that man believed when he offered me the position with Get Motivated Seminars, this was not the once in a lifetime opportunity that God had been preparing me for my whole life. This was a test from God to see if I would grab an easy counterfeit of the vision, He had just given me for my life, or if I would let it go, trusting Him to fulfill the promise, in His own time and through the long and difficult way.

It was in those days that my faith finally started feeling alive and valuable. It wasn't like with the Lord's Gym disaster, where I just held on to my faith through a storm over which I had no control. This was very different because I consciously chose to suffer loss, because of my faith, rather than simply holding on to my faith as I suffered loss. Even though I still had so much to learn, and was still wrong on so many things, from this day forward, my faith felt like it had weight to it. I had finally graduated from sitting in the pews at church or doing religious activities, and my living faith was now the most valuable and precious thing I possessed. I finally had a faith which was honored in heaven, a faith that would allow God to move me into action, not just a principle I gave lip service to with others in church. I felt such peace as well as the approval of heaven in my heart.

By the end of April, I had sent an email to all our friends and family reflecting on the recent lessons learned and explaining that Jennifer and I were at peace, enjoying our simplified life. I wrote about Jennifer being really focused on her triathlons and that I was still riding dirt bikes at least once a week, and often twice a week with the children. We had finally launched the new website for Kickstart My Sales, but I mention in the emails that I no longer want to be known as a sales trainer because it was no longer my "fire". Instead my focus had shifted to a project I was calling Kickstart My Life, where I was going to create a program about achieving "authentic success".

That word had become a new buzz word I grabbed onto after reading a book from a professing “Christian” author. I thought, surely God wouldn’t mind me teaching people to be “authentically successful”. This was still me being deceived by my own evil desires to love and save my life and by my perceived need to earn enough money to maintain our lavish lifestyle. It was me still compromising, because the concept of “authentic success” is just a way of dressing up the filthy pig of human greed and evil desires so we can love and enjoy our life in this world. You throw in some Scriptural principles, place emphasis on helping a few others along the way, and there you go. Your conscience has been eased and you are now free to love your life and pursue the whole world and its treasures. On the contrary, here is how Jesus’ defines authentic success.

John 12:25 The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

I was still feeling the pressure to make a large income and I was justifying this idea of teaching “authentic success” as being more pleasing to God than my sales training. I didn’t understand the real promise and blessing of Matthew 6:33, because I had been so long seeking first money and success and simply trying to add God’s kingdom and his righteousness like a cherry on top.

I think I felt like I had just done the big surrender with the Get Motivated seminar opportunity, and now that I was good with God, I could keep going on with my life, but it just needed to be in a better direction. After all that I had already been through in my life story so far, I still thought it was just about choosing a godlier career and doing whatever I wanted to do, in his name. I still did not understand one of the most fundamental principles of the Christian faith, the need to absolutely surrender everything in my life to God, to share in the death of Christ to self, and to trust Him completely to guide me and provide for me, in accordance with His unique will for my life.

I remained very wishy-washy about my convictions to stop teaching the hollow and deceptive success principles of men because I felt trapped by my need to maintain the lifestyle. If you are depending on the world for your income, you must sell what they are buying. I again started putting a few more irons in the fire, as if trying to figure out what I could get away with spiritually in my work, such that it wouldn’t violate my conscience, and yet I could still earn a good living.

My thinking at the time was very much along these lines. If God had given me a certain desire or ability in the world, then I should employ it at my will for his glory, rather than if I have this desire or ability, I should surrender it to His will. I can’t imagine how many singers, writers, actors, athletes, professionals or talented entrepreneurs there may have been, where God asked them to give it up, rather than to employ it on His behalf. There’s a big difference between our thinking and God’s thinking, just like there’s a big difference between natural gifts and spiritual gifts. Peter could have easily kept his natural gift of fishing and kept doing it all for the glory of God, but instead God asked him to give it up. I was naturally gifted in sales, and I could have just continued employing that gift in Jesus name, but instead He asked me to surrender it. What if God has given many of us our natural talents and abilities, not so much to be employed on his behalf, but rather so we can have something valuable to surrender to Him, when He calls?

For months, I continued battling about what direction to go in my career and how to earn a living while trying to satisfy my growing desire to work in the kingdom of God. In an email to my friend, Carol Ann Dykes on August 27th 2009, I write, *“I’m finally caving into the pressure from Jennifer to get out on the road and do the thing, I’m supposed to be doing ...speaking, and promoting the Kickstart brand.”*

At the same time, I was feeling her pressure, I felt an even stronger burden to find some way to do kingdom work and I felt one of those ways was to produce another documentary type God story for my friend Brad

Minns. Brad was a former three-time world deaf tennis champion and one of the first winners of what would become the “Body for Life” physique transformation competition. Most importantly, he had a powerful testimony about how Jesus Christ saved him and pulled him out of the world of fitness modeling.

Jennifer and I had known Brad since we had the Lord’s Gym when we had hired him as our head trainer. From that point forward, he and I had remained close friends and did quite a few things together. From the first few times I met Brad, I felt like I was his biggest fan. He was one of the most loving and humble Christians I’d ever met, and you could tell he really loved Christ and was so bold about sharing his faith. Brad was an inspiration to me and I felt like His story could be so encouraging to other Christians, and that he needed to be out there speaking to others. I couldn’t understand why people weren’t ringing his phone off the hook to have him speak. I wanted so badly to help get his story out there.

It was going to take a lot of my time and work to produce the story, and Jennifer was very reluctant, but because it was Brad, she finally agreed for us to help him this way. I ended up taking more time to produce the story than I had expected, and Jennifer once again became so critical of my work, telling me God didn’t need me to try this hard, and that I was wasting my time. Jennifer and I had gotten into a bitter argument about it, just before I left to take them a finished DVD of his story. They were so pleased with the video, that Brad unexpectedly gave me a check for \$2000 for the video. I was so blessed, because we not only needed the money, but I felt like God was validating the hard work and my obedience to do the work, even though it wasn’t paid work.

I was so mad at Jennifer from all her contempt and disrespect that by the time I came home, I slammed the check down on the counter top as hard as I possible could, while exclaiming, “*How’s that for wasting my time?*”. Even though I was so angry and unlike Christ when I said that, I so hoped she would eventually feel remorse and be humbled, but of course that didn’t happen. From here, things only got worse, until I once again could no longer take it.

Immediately, I moved some of my clothes and things out of our room and into the movie theater upstairs, where I slept on a blow-up bed. I was again so ready to end the marriage and was making my plans. After only a few days of sleeping up there, she came to me in the sweetest manner that I have ever seen from her, and she softly pleaded with me to move back into our bedroom. When I saw that she was still refusing to take responsibility for her part, I told her I was just going to stay living in the movie theater until we separated because I was finished. That is when she eventually said, “*I admit Michael, that I have not treated you like the gift you are, which God has given me.*” As shocking as those words were to hear, and as badly as I wanted to hear them, I knew they were an absolute lie.

Proverbs 26:24-26 NLT – People may cover their hatred with pleasant words, but they’re deceiving you. They pretend to be kind, but don’t believe them. Their hearts are full of many evils. While their hatred may be concealed by trickery, their wrongdoing will be exposed in public.

I knew that this was once again all that same evil manipulation to keep me from leaving and ruining her image. She was now counting on me to keep this lifestyle of ours going, because she loved it so much! After this her heart became even harder and harder towards me. She started standing against everything I did or said, including the books I read, the ideas I had, the clients I pursued, the friends I hung out with, etc.

What I didn’t know at the time, was that after all these years of being so stubborn, so self-sufficient and trying so hard to deliver myself in all kinds of situations, I was now standing right on the edge of total collapse and brokenness before my God. I do not say this to make myself sound more important than I am, but the Bible says we are all surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, and I believe there must have been

a significant audience in heaven, watching in great expectation of what God was about to do to finally break, the unbreakable horse in my heart.

Chapter 18

From Total Brokenness to Absolute Surrender

After 19 years of calling myself a Christian, and yet living primarily in accordance to my own strength, my own understanding, and my own will, I was now just a few days away from total brokenness and the willingness to absolutely surrender my entire life and abandon my will to the Lord.

Jennifer had gone from being severely irritated and manipulative with me to downright enraged, and to a degree that was truly unbelievable. Our accusations against each other increased, with me claiming she had a severe anger issue, and her claiming I was a bipolar monster.

Her explosive anger had reached its scary climax, during my talks with Get Motivated seminars. Once, during a conversation, I tried to defend the man who offered me the position, against her slanderous allegations against him. I pleaded with her to remember that just because something is written on the internet, doesn't mean it's true. I said to her, *"Have you forgotten all the false allegations made about us, after the Lord's Gym closed?"* There had been rumors that we went out and bought a new \$70k Mercedes with all our gym members money, and another rumor that we had fled the country and moved to the Bahamas. Not to mention the news stories which had made us out to look like criminals, who had intentionally stolen our member's money.

That's when she blew. Unless you've seen it, you can't imagine how scary it is to see a person whose manner is typically very austere, and self-controlled, to then blow up out of control like this. It was so shocking that my nervous system would react to it, and I would literally start shaking from anxiety and my stomach would twist and churn into knots. Each time I would confront her anger problem, her response was to always accuse me of being bipolar. I wanted so badly to prove to her that something was seriously broken inside of her, that while she was standing in our home office screaming at the top of her lungs at me, right in front of our small children, I picked up our large \$5000 production video camera, held it pointing right at her and hit record, saying something to the effect, *"You will never believe what you look like right now unless you see it for yourself"*.

She was in such a rage, that she didn't even care about the camera. With the camera recording, she was screaming and cussing and flipping me the middle finger as she walked right past our youngest son Nathan, who looks so afraid and confused. I got up and followed her out of the office and to our bedroom, still recording her as she was screaming at the top of her lungs. She got to our bedroom door and then turned around and spewed like angry sulfurous volcano, with the camera still recording.

I couldn't see it then, but years later, when I looked back at those video images, I could see the closest thing to the devil that I ever saw in our home. Her eyes were black and glassy, and her face was filled with such rage and hate, that the only way for her to look more demon possessed, would have been if she was foaming at the mouth. At the time of this event, I wasn't prepared to even imagine something like demonic possession or demonic torment as a possibility. My picture of demon possession was still limited to what we all saw in the movie "The Exorcist", where her head starts spinning on her shoulders, and she levitates off the bed. I had no idea that a demon possessed or tormented person, like King Saul starting in 1 Samuel

16, can live a seemingly normal life much of the time and then just have these moments where they come under total possession of the evil spirit and suddenly try to pin you against the wall with a spear, etc.

In my ignorance, I simply concluded that all of this was anger from some hidden root of childhood trauma and unforgiveness, which could be dealt with by counseling. I had no idea that even Jesus himself taught that unforgiveness in your heart will lead to demonic torment (See Matthew 18:21-35).

By October of 2009, she had become to me what King Saul was to David, where in 1 Samuel 16, the Spirit of the Lord departed from King Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord was sent to torment him. That evil spirit in King Saul was being used to punish him, but more importantly it was going to be used by God for many years to chastise David and prepare him to become the greatest leader of God's people, Israel. One-minute King Saul could be at peace with David, saying even humble or kind words to him, and then the next minute, the evil spirit would seize King Saul and he would throw a spear, trying to pin David to the wall and kill him. When you read the whole story, it seems like King Saul was perhaps the first true Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

Things continued to escalate between us, all the way into the end of October, where I find the following desperate "Psalm like" prayer which I wrote out to God on October 27th, 2009.

Father,

Please help me Lord! I am so exhausted from fighting this spiritual battle. I feel like I have met my match this time. I can't believe that I had those thoughts this morning about telling the devil, to give me his best shot. I considered those words in my head, and then considered that the devil's best can't hurt, because as Christian's we should be smart enough and strong enough to see it for what it is. How ignorant and prideful it was for me to even flirt with those thoughts, Lord. What happened afterwards this morning, proves it.

Father, the pattern is so predictable, yet the attacks grow stronger each time. Here I am trying to write a book that I believe you want me to write about YOU, and the truth about ambition and pursuing success, and here I am working on a testimonial video about bringing people to salvation and then BAM! ATTACK!

This seems to happen EVERY SINGLE TIME I TRY TO DO SOMETHING GOOD FOR THE KINGDOM. Father, I sense that you are telling me that I have not yet learned my lesson about dealing with spiritual attack.

Father, I'm so tired of this particular battle with my wife, especially when I can so clearly see what the issue is (Pause...at least I thought I could see so clearly what was going on) I continue.....it's frustrating like crazy that she can't see it. For years, we have simply kissed and made up and put band-aids on a problem she must be experiencing in her heart, deep down. There is a root of bitterness from something, God.

Yesterday, when I confronted her on it, I felt a small sense of relief when she was able to take responsibility for "not taking enough time for herself". However, it was a total shocker when she then said she wouldn't wish her life on her worst enemy. That shows that she is not being truthful about her feelings, the rest of the time. She denies herself for so long and then she takes it out on me and the kids...mostly me by lashing out when the anger builds to a point where it must be released.

The anger comes out of her like poison and of course the enemy uses it to push every single one of my hot buttons...accusing me of being bipolar, not being a good enough helper or provider, or just saying that she's been miserable for the last 14 years...after things have been so wonderful in recent times. It's as if she sears her conscience and says those things...purely to hurt me. Just 4 weeks ago, she stopped me,

hugged me, and held me while telling me how proud she was to be my partner in life, and how honored she was to be on this journey with me. Then on Saturday, when I go for a motorcycle ride to Merritt Island for 4 hours to work on my book, she bursts out in anger and says, "Well, don't expect me to babysit while you are gone". This is after she had a running race on Saturday and Sunday, where I watched the children, and then I managed to squeeze some time in between. Then that turns into three days of not talking to me and when we do talk...she re-beats me up with the last 14 years of her being miserable...telling me our friends husbands treat them like princesses and send them to the spa and just one dart after another.... I STAND THERE IN SHOCK AND CAN'T BELIEVE SHE CAN'T SEE THE INSANITY BEHIND THIS.

Things were great last week...she couldn't be happier, but now she drags me back through 14 years' worth of things I apparently did to make her this angry! When I suggest that I don't know much longer I will be able to live with this anger in the house, she immediately jumps with great bitterness to the topic of divorce and with such contempt for our marriage. I am losing more and more TRUST in her each time she does this. If she were just my business partner, this would have been a huge red flag and I would exit the partnership.

This has happened no less than 10 to 15 times in the last 16 years. Her first solution to the pain and frustration is ... fine...let's just get a divorce. Then after she says such a hurtful and disconnecting comment, she gets mad again the next day, if I'm not all cheerful and ready to be normal again. I was able to get over those comments faster in the past, but with each passing blow of anger or poisonous outburst, I notice it is taking me longer to re-cover and re-connect with healthy and loving feelings for her.

Each episode now leaves a scar...even when the outbursts aren't directed to me, but rather to a client or relative...I still feel separation from her by those events as well. For days on end...this will completely zap me and drain me of my energy to be around her.

The most amazing thing is her ability to flip things around and say, "I never know who I'm living with from day to day." When in fact, she is simply experiencing the fruit in my life, from her outbursts or crazy mood swings. I had a 3-week period, of terrible sinus issues that drain me of my energy, make me quiet and make me irritable. She has used that period to now completely attempt to justify her behavior and swear that she "knows deep down inside" that something is wrong with me. I can only stand there with my jaw on the floor, when I hear this.

Father...how in the world can someone be in such complete denial? She is always stuck at the surface level...she is unable to deal in the root of the problems. No matter how hard I try to go there in the conversation, she always manages to stay twisted up and focused on the external details or the supposed events or circumstances that somehow she believes justify her anger.

I can tell from this morning that she is now trying to get the kids on her side and dropping hints about...have you noticed how Daddy has been feeling? Bringing up John and Shelva divorcing because he was bipolar...saying I can call 15 people right now, even your mom, who will tell you that you have a problem. If she wasn't so "red eyed" angry when she says these things, it would qualify as delusional.

She is unable to see the truth about the fact that she has no desire to read your word, God, she has very little desire for relationships, she has NO real relationships that aren't a by-product of my friendships, to begin with. She can't stand her mom, can't stand my mom, and only has nice things to say about one of our clients. She is overly critical about everyone God and to be completely honest I am SICK AND TIRED of trying to manage this and deal with this. She immediately feels threatened by anybody that I suggest is a "nice or high quality" person....friend, vendor, customer...it's doesn't matter. I am sick and tired of

living with this and sick and tired of having the same big fights occur every quarter or so. Whatever triggers her anger at the time, I then get to feel the full wrath of it.

God, I know that you had me see that Charles Stanley program on anger for a reason, and I was so encouraged about the part about how to live with a person who is angry. However, Lord, I used to judge Charles Stanley for getting a divorce, until I heard what I believe was a delicate way of him explaining that he too has lived with someone he loved who had a terrible issue with anger. I believe that must have been his wife he was talking about, and I could tell how helpless he felt about it.

Father, is there not hope for these people? Why are some people in such strongholds like this, that they can't see it? I do not understand this at all and I'm almost in denial that this could be possible for a person that loves God. I do question her love for you, since she never even has a desire to read your word. She seems to worship the subject of "leadership" and people that talk about it, but not You. What is going on there?

Lord...I'm tired of feeling guilty about staying in our marriage, just because of the children. I look at the marriage that her parents have, and I say...give me death over a marriage like that...what is the point of being married? There is obviously a huge disconnect there and in 14 years, I've not seen a single instance that I can remember that would demonstrate love and affection between those two. How can that be happiness? How can you be pleased with them, just because they are following the "LAW"? Did they stay married, just for the sake of their Christianity? Father, isn't that honoring you with lips and not the heart?

Living with an angry person makes me also angry, and I'm not a mean or angry person unless my hottest of hot buttons are pushed, and Jennifer knows exactly how to push them. God...I'm so disappointed with the carnal nature of man...it's makes me sick that we all must go through such brokenness. Father...why was I able to get set free from the dysfunction of my childhood? Why did you preserve me?

You are asking to me to help others and yet I can't even help my own wife!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

She is beyond my help...Father, I'm losing trust that things will ever be different. I've hoped for years and I've had so many times of hope that things had changed, but then BAM, out of nowhere, there it comes again. Father, do you expect for me to just live with someone who is continually miserable and angry and runs as hot and cold as a shower knob? Am I supposed to endure, or am I supposed to move on with my life and do the best I can with my children and hope for a healthy relationship with her as my ex-wife?

God....PLEASE COME INTO THIS...PLEASE COME INTO THIS LORD. I'm at the end of me...I'm disappointed, I'm frustrated and I'm losing my hope.

Stuff like this makes me instantly want to give up the whole passion inside of me to help people succeed and just return to my career in sales. I know that I am only responsible for my own actions, but Lord I'm so hurt by this!

I know that she will not want to get counseling and even if she does, she will fight going to the depths of her heart to see what is there. There are rooms in her heart, she has not invited you into. Lord, I feel like you just told me, that that is the reason I have been able to be healed in so many of those areas of my life...because I invited you into the dark places to shed your light.

Let me pause reading the prayer here and explain what the Lord had just taught me while I was writing, but that I didn't fully understand or appreciate yet. I was pleading with the Lord as to why, even though we all start out evil and carnal, that some people accept correction and change, using myself as an example, and why others do not, using Jennifer as an example.

The Holy Spirit gave me a very simple understanding in that moment which was to say that the reason I was being corrected and changed was because I had openly invited God into the dark places of my heart. God accepts those who have an honest heart, even though their life may be currently filled with tons of sin or ignorance. The Scripture that this principle comes from is in Luke 8:15, which says in the NASB *“But the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance.”* The only person whom God ever said, was a man after His own heart, wrote the following words. *“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.”* Those are the words of King David in Psalm 139:23-24. David had an honest heart.

An honest heart is the key, and even though Jennifer and I were both full of evil at this time, I had an honest heart that was willing to openly confess to God, all the sin that I could see at the time. I resisted the temptation of trying to hide my sins from God when He gave me light on them. Many people, even professing Christians, will never change because they do not have an honest heart before God. They are not willing to come into the Light of God’s word and presence so that their evil can be exposed, confessed, purged, and redeemed. Instead, they continue to hide, or to make excuses, justify themselves, or blame others.

John 3:19-21 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. (20) Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. (21) But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.”

The difference between these two types of people, according to Luke 8:15, is an honest or noble heart. An honest heart is willing to be laid bare before the Lord, so that His light may penetrate the darkness. Many people are simply too self-righteous, or prideful to allow God to truly examine their hearts. Such was the case with the Pharisees.

Just this morning, the very day I’m writing this, I made a journal recording where I said that my life, even as a maturing spiritual man of God, continues to be one act of repentance after another. I find I am constantly changing my mind, which is what true repentance is, about things I believe, thoughts I have, words I speak, or choices I make. As the Lord continues to give me light on more ways I am falling short of Christ, I go directly to Him in prayer and hold nothing back. I openly speak to Him, and invite Him into those dark places, rather than make excuses, lie, or blame someone else.

It’s painful when He corrects me, and it takes humility to hear it and face it, but there is always a spiritual blessing behind it, and there is no other way to please God. The Father is full of mercy, but He demands that we be honest about our sin failures, and not to be like Adam and Eve, who tried to hide from God. There is no hope for a person who will not be honest about their sin. It is much easier to avoid the pain of correction by making excuses, or ignoring the correction, but the day I stop acknowledging His light and correction in those places, is the day I no longer have an honest heart, and also the day I will cease to be blessed and kept fruitful by God.

Now, back to my prayer...

Father...this past year, we have made such progress, or so I thought. I have told countless people, that this has been the best year of my life...not stress free, but the best year of my life. Our Marriage felt like it was a ten until the trip to the rainforest came. Then things went straight downhill...Father I believe I have not been prideful about it, but rather thankful, so why is this happening?

It is because there are places in her heart that she is not only unwilling to take a look at herself, but she is also unwilling to invite you into them....WHY LORD? WHY LORD? It is so easy to do, and it is so FREEING. I love you God, thank you so much for giving me whatever it is you did, that made me so open to receiving feedback and correction from you...that is the best quality you gave me...Thank You Thank You.

Why didn't she get that quality Lord? Is there something I'm not seeing? Is there a generational curse? Her mother is certainly a dishonest, jealous, and passive aggressive woman. Her mom is likely just as angry as she is, but she has learned to show it through "passive" aggression, rather than direct outward anger.

Oh, God, I'm getting overwhelmed, just writing all of this down, but I feel like I must get it out of my head. FATHER, above all things I have ever asked you, please give me clarity in this one area. What do you wish my response to be? I surrender my response and my family to you Lord. It is incredibly difficult to Love someone and to be loved by someone who doesn't love them self. What a disaster this could be...an entire family torn apart because of one person's denial and inability to consider the depths of her own heart.

Oh, God, rescue her heart Father...Let whatever needs to happen to get her attention in this matter and shine the light on the dark spots of her heart. God, in the name of Jesus Christ and by the power and authority of the real blood of Jesus Christ, please rescue her heart Lord. Father, I don't love her anger, but I love her, and I deeply love my family.... please save them God...please save them. Don't let the enemy steal your children and your work that has yet to be completed in us.

Father, I pray in the name of Jesus, that she is released from her strongholds, that the enemy, who is currently claiming victory, would be put in last place Father, not just when Jesus comes back, but NOW!

Lord, I turn her over to you and pray that you have your way with her. Father I ask that she would be made even more miserable, that she would be broken before you. Break her heart with what breaks yours Lord. Please don't let anything happen to my family, but God, maybe something could touch her heart this weekend, as she goes on vacation, alone with the 3 older kids. If you can do this without pain, God, I would please ask that you do that, nevertheless, I ask for YOUR HOLY and PERFECT WILL.

God...please rescue her heart! Please rescue her heart...I beg you for this more than anything I have ever asked for. Father, the rest of my prayers can go unanswered, if you would but answer this one prayer. Forsake everything I have asked for and instead answer this pray...please bring your living waters and your restoration to her heart...in the name of Jesus Christ, I pray...Amen.

I love you Lord...I'm am so broken over this...my heart is before you in tears. I'm fearful Lord that this won't change. The battle seems too long and the stronghold too deep, yet I will still believe that YOU CAN DO THIS, IF YOU DESIRE.

This was the end of the prayer. Ironically, I didn't realize that I was asking God to do something He cannot do. God cannot rescue or save a dishonest and proud heart. Jesus said that the only people that are qualified to be saved, are those who are willing to become poor in spirit, to change and become like little children, and to honestly confess and change their mind about their sin. See Mat 5:8, 18:3-4, Mat 5:29-30.

It is interesting to look back knowing now, that God NOT only wasn't going to answer my desperate, faith-filled, prayers to rescue her heart, but that He was going to do the exact opposite by hardening her heart against me even more. It serves as another colorful reminder of the truth about God found in Isaiah 55:8-9, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the

heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” We all know that verse, but we don’t often understand how radically true it is. God doesn’t always work the way *we* think He should.

Jennifer and I had planned a short family vacation for three days later, on Friday October 30th 2009, with our three oldest children, to go to the Disney resort on Hilton Head Island, South Carolina. However, we had another blow up just that morning before I wrote that prayer. She came out on the porch that morning to enquire why I was still reading the Bible that morning, when there were other things that needed to be done. I told her that I was really trying to work hard on myself and find in God’s word, where I needed to grow. I said, *“Why don’t you start reading the Bible and do the same?”* She replied, *“Because I don’t have much to work on as you do.”* I replied, *“That’s ok, if you come and out and read the Bible with me, I’ll help you find some things you can work on.”* She gave me that look of disgust and stammered off in anger, accusing me of being a hypocrite, angrily yelling, *“Live it Michael...don’t talk it...live it!”* I knew that morning that I would just stay home and let her take the children on vacation by herself, but I had no idea what the Lord had planned.

Shortly after they left on the morning of Friday October 30th, 2009, I began a day long fast from food and read the Bible for six to seven hours straight. The Word felt so alive and so powerful to me, and as I read, I made journal notes and prayed to God about various things. I cannot even remember what triggered it, but that afternoon, I ended up on my knees crying out in absolute surrender to God, like never before.

I told Him I was sick and tired of living on the fence, being torn between Him and Success. I remember confessing that my life was not working with me at the helm and that no matter what I tried, I had no peace in my heart. Finally, I told Him that I either wanted all of Him, or none of Him, because I could no longer live double-minded as I was. As if to prove to Him I was serious, I looked up to heaven and said, *“God you can have my entire life now. I give you my life, this house, my business, my dreams, my goals, my plans, etc. Father, even if you need to take my wife and children from me, God I give you all.”*

In that moment, the Holy Spirit was breathing into my spirit the importance of putting God above all, even my marriage, even my five beautiful children. I knew there was nothing more important than doing God’s will, regardless of the consequences. This was not an Old Covenant prayer like when Jacob prayed, *“God if you protect and provide for me and my family and keep us together, then I will serve you and you will be my God.”* No! This was a New Covenant prayer, *“God, I give you my wife and children, do with them as you see fit, and I will still serve you and follow you wherever you lead.”*

This moment was the most important day in my 19 years of being a professing Christian. I don’t even remember the day, I started believing in Christ, or asked Him to save me, but I will never forget October 30th, 2009, the day I had what Oswald Chambers calls my “white funeral day”. I finally died to my will being done after all those years of trying so hard to make my own life and Christianity work.

The Lord had patiently watched and waited for just the right time to finally and fully break me. This wasn’t just an emotional moment of desperation, in hopes of once again trying to manipulate God into making my plans work. No, this was the willingness and desire for total abandonment of every part of my will and life, as I knew it, because I longed for Him. I wanted all of Him, regardless of what it cost.

I don’t truly know why the Lord tarried with me as long as He did, and why He was so patient. However, if I had to give an answer, I would say that it was because He saw that I had a good heart, but that I was living in ignorance and deception of His true ways, not in deliberate rebellion. I cannot recall, anyone, not

even my pastors, ever really teaching me the need for absolute surrender to God, and how without it, you have nothing. First base with God is absolute surrender, and I never had anyone like myself, to explain that to me. Even though Jesus taught it right there in the Bible, my Christianity was deceiving me because I was largely allowing my pastors or Bible study group leaders to point me to the subjects I needed to learn and focus on. I had a very comfortable, but very false and unfruitful Christianity. I had a Christianity that taught me that the family unit was the answer and savior for all the problems in the world and Church, not taking up the cross of Christ. I thought that if I could just keep my family together, that would mean I was being a successful Christian and I was good with God. That made so much sense to me.

However, Jesus taught the exact opposite of this, and I never saw it or understood it. Jesus had a very different teaching on the family than our pastors did, and that's why so many avoid the following types of teaching from Jesus.

Luke 14:26-28,33 "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. (27) And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. (33) In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.

Indeed, we should love our families, but never at the expense of allegiance to the commands and call of Jesus Christ in our life. He demands to be first and last, regardless of the possible cost. Just as I was experiencing in my marriage to Jennifer, many times, following Jesus wholeheartedly will bring painful division between you and the one's you love the most. However, when a person is willing to lose their loved ones for their love for God, it is clear that they love Him with all of their heart, mind, soul and strength, just as God commands.

Matthew 10:34-39 "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. (35) For I have come to turn "a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law— (36) a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.' (37) "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; (38) and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. (39) Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

We resist this thinking very much, because the whole world worships the idea of a strong family unit, but Jesus himself, put not value on blood relatives whatsoever when there was no spiritual relation through being born again and walking by the Spirit of God.

Matthew 8:21-22 Another disciple said to him, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." (22) But Jesus told him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead."

Matthew 12:46-50 While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. (47) Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you." (48) He replied to him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" (49) Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. (50) For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

Just as Jesus taught, God was bringing division into my family and what I was about to go through next was going to be the most excruciating part of our marriage yet. I find great encouragement to look back on the stories of the Israelites in Exodus, when I see that after they started crying out to God, the Pharaoh became even more vicious towards them. Their deliverance from Pharaoh was on its way, but not before

things got even darker. I too was crying out to God for deliverance. I too wanted to be free to worship God the way He desired, and I too was about to experience the darkest night of my soul.

Chapter 19

The Beginning of the End

“In every painful spiritual darkness or conflict, it has already comforted me to think that God might be leading me through strange dark ways, so that I might afterward be His messenger to some of His children in distress,” – Frances Ridley Havergal

“The power to help others depends upon the acceptance of a trampled life.” – L. B. Cowman – July 12th
Streams in the Desert Devotional

December 31st, 2009 11:35pm (New Year’s Eve)

On a night that is meant to for celebrating the arrival of a new year and fresh new start, a time when you’re supposed to rejoice with special friends and family, I was all alone and scared to death about our future. While all five of my small children were peacefully asleep in their rooms, I was about to taste hell on just the other side of the house. The memory of me sitting on the back porch, just weeks earlier, telling the devil *“Go ahead...take your best shot.”* flooded my mind.

Jennifer’s parents had agreed to watch the children on New Year’s Eve, so we could attempt to have some quiet time to work things out. We went to dinner at the Cape Canaveral Pier House Restaurant, and I was so hopeful that the evening alone at the ocean might help us to catch our breath and make one more attempt at moving forward. Dinner was rather uneventful, which after all that had been going on, was sort of pleasant to me, so I had a small glimmer of hope as we left the restaurant.

On the way home, we decided to stop by my Dad’s house to let him and my step-brother know that we couldn’t go with them to Disney on New Year’s Day. They came to the door and I began apologizing, saying that we had been having some serious problems in our marriage, but that we were going to be trying to get some help and work on it. Just then, Jennifer grabbed my arm, cut me off, looked at both of them and said, *“No, weeeeeee don’t have problems, Michael has problems, and Michael is going to go to a Psychiatrist to get some help!”* I was stunned and completely humiliated all at the same time.

As soon as we got in the car and left, years of dealing with this type of attitude filled my heart with disgust and my blood started to boil in anger. Within just minutes of driving down the highway, I couldn’t hold it in any longer and I just blew up and just screamed at her, for several minutes, in total disgust that she continued to accept zero responsibility for anything in the marriage. Here again, the evil in her, was exposing the evil in me. I have no doubt that if a video camera had been pointed at me, I looked just as evil in that moment, as she did when I had the camera pointed at her. Even though I felt justified in the moment, I was filled with the unrighteous anger of man which the Bible says does not bring about the righteousness

of God. My conscience was being violated and I knew I was doing wrong, so I caught my breath, shut my mouth, and drove the rest of the hour home in complete silence.

By the time we arrived at our neighborhood, my anger was calmed but I was still in so much pain that I decided I couldn't even be in the house with her any longer. I told her that I was going to go stay with a friend for a few days. I had to get away from her because by now I couldn't even stand to hear her voice. It was already 11:30 at night, but I started texting a few friends to see if I could come stay at their place for the night. I had sold my truck (to try to make her happy), so all I had at the time was my motorcycle. When she saw how serious I was about leaving, she began trying to appease me to stay. When she saw I was not budging, she began threatening to call the police if I left without telling her where I was going. She kept saying she was worried about me leaving on New Year's Eve and driving somewhere on my motorcycle at night. I knew this was more of her lies and manipulation and I was done talking.

She kept following me around the house pestering me, and I just kept telling her to please leave me alone and to get out of the office, so I could be alone. She just kept asking, "*Are you going to leave Michael...are you going to leave...just tell me, are you going to leave on your motorcycle?*" I said, "*I do not know, but if you're truly worried about my safety, the safest thing for both of us, is for you to leave this office and leave me alone...please just leave me alone!*" She finally left, and I locked myself in the office to try to recover from what was happening.

Out of desperation to defend and protect myself, I had started audio recording her rages against me like this, ever since I captured that first episode on video camera. This night was no exception, and right in front of her, while sitting at my desk, I hit record on my phone and recorded everything we were saying. If I could do it all over again, I obviously wouldn't have recorded anything, but I was still such a carnal Christian and was so afraid of being falsely accused that I was determined to defend myself against her lies.

I didn't yet know how to trust God in spiritual battles like this, and I certainly didn't understand what Paul taught in Ephesians chapter six. I still thought I was fighting very much against flesh and blood rather than against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. The spiritual forces of evil cannot be defeated by the schemes and tools of man, but at that time, I felt like if I didn't defend myself, no one else would. I remember thinking, "*no one will believe me if I don't record this, because she makes it look on the outside like she is just the most perfect wife and mom.*" I also didn't realize that God is already recording everything we say and do in heaven, and that the judge of all the earth didn't need my help to defend me. (See Mat 12:36-37, Revelation 20:12)

Within a few minutes, I was sitting on the hard-cold wood floor in our home office next to my desk, rocking back and forth, wrapped in my own arms, desperately trying to comfort myself from the gut-wrenching pain. I was physically, mentally, and emotionally exhausted and I was being spiritually tormented.

I had worship music from Michael W. Smith blasting through my computer speakers. I was trying so hard to find God's help and to distract myself from the searing emotional pain. I couldn't stop crying and I was scared to death because I knew we were finished. I might have been a 36-year-old man in my body, but spiritually and emotionally I felt like a lost little child in the woods who couldn't find their mommy or daddy anywhere.

As I sat just rocking back and forth, singing with the songs, I could hear words of hope and words of rescue, but I couldn't feel them as my current reality. The songs all declared God's greatness, His protection, His love and His presence, but He was NO where to be found in that dark cold office and I was in total agony. This was going to be the devil's night, and somehow, I just knew it. Looking back, I can see this as a type of Garden of Gethsemane experience, where Jesus is crying out to God to save Him, but instead of being rescued, He is about to be betrayed at the highest level by one of those He loved dearly.

My phone was still sitting on my desk recording audio and the music was still blaring from my computer speakers, when suddenly, I heard two loud bangs against the locked double doors into my office and then they busted open. I looked up from the floor behind my desk and saw a police officer looking at me. He yelled over the music, "*Mr. Chriswell...are you ok?*", I honestly thought I was seeing things. It took him taking about 3 steps into the office when I realized this was for real and my mind began screaming, "*She did it...she actually went this far...she knows I'm going to leave the marriage and it will be humiliating for her, so now she has found an excuse to call the cops so that it looks like I'm the bi-polar maniac that she has been accusing me of being to our friends and family.*"

I didn't remember the warning God had given me in the dream in the rainforest, and I was caught so off guard by all of this that I couldn't process the reality of what was happening fast enough. This evening which started with a glimmer of hope at dinner, had now turned into a scandalous night of evil and betrayal. Sure, our marriage had been in crisis, and I wanted out of it, but I never saw this kind of willful betrayal on her part coming. The wife of my youth, the woman I slept next to for nearly 15 years, and had coffee with in the mornings, my business partner, and the mother of my five children had just betrayed me by intentionally assassinating my character to the police. I could see she was now willing to do anything to protect her own image and it scared me to death!

Psalm 55:11 NLT – Everything is falling apart...it is not an enemy who taunts me—I could bear that. It is not my foes who so arrogantly insult me—I could have hidden from them. Instead, it is you—my equal, my companion and close friend. What good fellowship we once enjoyed as we walked together to the house of God.

As I got up off the floor and sat down in my office chair, the officer started asking me questions,

"How are you feeling tonight, Mr. Chriswell?" I said, *"Sir, I'm in complete shock. I was sitting in my own house, in my own office, behind a locked door, and a police officer just busted in my door, how would you feel, right about now?"*

He said, *"Sir, I knocked and knocked."* I replied, *"Yes, and you could tell I was listening to blasting loud music and I couldn't hear anything."* He then said, *"I'm sorry I startled you, but we did receive a call from your wife and we have to come and make sure everything is ok, so I just need to ask you some questions, Mr. Chriswell."*

By now, I was shaking and starting to breath heavy. It was late at night and I was completely exhausted, running off pure adrenaline.

I kept shaking my head and saying, *"I have no idea why my wife called you or why you are here; I can't believe this is happening."* He said, *"Don't worry, no one is going to jail as of yet, I just need to find out what's going on."*

I thought to myself, *“Boy that’s comforting to know, no one is going to jail as of yet?”* That’s kind of like a doctor saying to a patient, who came in with a cold, *“Don’t worry, you’re not going to die tonight.”*

He started his questions, *“Mr. Chriswell, have you been drinking tonight?”* I said, *“No, I’ve never been drunk in my whole life, and I don’t drink.”*

“Have you taken any narcotics...on any medications?” I replied, *“Never, and no.”*

Then he asked, *“Do you have any guns in the house...any knives or swords or other weapons?”*

I said, *“No, and I can’t believe you are asking me these questions...I’m not that kind of person...I’m a God-fearing Christian man...I was in here crying and praying and listening to Christian worship music for crying out loud, when you came in. My wife and I are just having marital problems and I think our marriage is over...that’s it...nothing crazy is going on, except the fact that she has now blown this way out of proportion and called you guys, to make me look like a freak. I was just locked in here to keep away from her, because she wouldn’t leave me alone.”*

“I understand, Mr. Chriswell. This is just routine to make sure everyone is ok and that everyone will be safe here tonight. I said, “Why don’t you come over here to my computer and I’ll show you who I am, I’m a successful business owner, a respected speaker and Christian man. Some of the top business people in Orlando, are my friends...I can show you a video of people talking about who I am on my website.”

He said, *“I understand, Mr. Chriswell, but bad things happen regardless of social status. I might remind you of the millionaire, who lives in Isleworth, and who just shot and killed his wife in their home not too long ago.”*

That comment shut me right up, and I stopped desperately trying to show him I was not some nut. Just 90 days earlier, Bob Ward, a millionaire developer who lived in Isleworth had murdered his wife. Isleworth is the wealthiest neighborhood in Central FL and is where Tiger Woods lived before his divorce.

I eventually caught my breath and calmed down and he finished all his questions and the report. I felt like my soul had just been torn right in half. I had been doing ok against the accusations around the house and to our family, but this was a whole new level of betrayal. Evil had just stepped up the level of game play, and my only sense of hope at the time was that I had recorded every second of it. Nevertheless, I was still screaming in my mind, *“Someone please wake me up from this nightmare...this cannot be happening to me...this cannot be happening to my family! God...where are you...why won’t you stop this...please help me Lord!”*

After the officer left, with the recorder still going, I confronted her on her outright betrayal and she started pleading with me in the softest and calmest voice, telling me over and over that the only reason she called the police was because she was worried about me going out on my motorcycle that night. Oh, the pain and anger that comes when you see the person who is supposed to love you, completely cut off their conscience, lie right to your face with syrupy sweet words, and yet stabbing you in the back with a knife at the same time?

Proverbs 20:30 Blows and wounds cleanse away evil, and beatings purge the inmost being.

In my spiritual blindness, I felt like the innocent victim at the hands of Jennifer and the devil. However, God was looking at me like He looked at Jacob, as a self-sufficient rebel, who needed strong correction and disciplining. God was working to bring humility, poverty of spirit, and character into my life through all of this, but I remember feeling like this was all just senseless attacks of the devil that would end in destruction.

Job 5:17-19 "Blessed is the man whom God corrects; so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty. (18) For he wounds, but he also binds up; he injures, but his hands also heal. (19) From six calamities he will rescue you; in seven no harm will befall you.

Who could possibly believe that I would ever want peace with her again, or ever give our marriage another shot after that horrible night? The desire to stay married for my children and the fear of divorce was so strong, that I once again did.

We had tried marriage counseling in years past, but by the second visit, he began inquiring about her responsibilities for the trouble in the marriage and that was all it took. She told me on the way home she didn't like him, and we never went back. This time, my friend Eddy Moratin and his wife, whom she seemed to respect, came over and mediated a final talk between us, to see if we could come to any terms of peace.

At the end of that talk, she maintained that I was bipolar and needed to see a psychiatrist, and I was still convinced she had anger and rage problems and needed counseling through our church. As a last effort to make peace, I reluctantly agreed to go to a psychiatrist for evaluation, if she would agree to go to counseling about her anger. We both agreed to this in front of Eddy and his wife, but within just days she started making excuses as to why she was not going to go to counseling, so I decided I was not going to go to a psychiatrist.

Instead, at the recommendation of my friend Larry Smith, I immediately started going through a program at our church called "Restoration counseling". I knew I had plenty of issues I needed to deal with from my childhood and I wanted to be the best me that I could be, regardless of what Jennifer was going to do.

Almost immediately, the counseling had a huge impact on my hope. I felt like they had all the answers when they started connected my current thinking and behaviors all the way back to my childhood. I got excited about going to the first few sessions and left feeling such hope for a brighter future, a better me, and a redeemed marriage.

A major emphasis in the counseling, which was great, was on forgiveness. I assumed that because I had been able to openly talk about all the abuses in my past, that I had forgiven everyone from my heart, but I began to realize that I probably hadn't. They had me write mock letters to all the people who had hurt me the most in my past, pouring out all that they had done to me and how much it hurt, including the bullies. I cried a lot and then agreed before God, and the two counselors, to forgive all of them.

This created such a rush of joy in me that I ended up getting on an emotional high that became nothing short of delusional. I think after being accused for so long of being bi-polar, I was perhaps elated to discover what they believed was the real root of my problems, the issues I faced in my childhood. To them, I wasn't bi-polar, I was just wounded; I didn't need drugs, I needed inner healing. As a result, I started going home to Jennifer after each session and taking full responsibility for everything that was going wrong in the marriage. I started apologizing for the business failures, the bad spending decisions, not doing enough housework, the two cars and a jet boat I bought in the previous 14 years which she hated, not respecting

her opinions regarding my business decisions, and for being so often selfish, etc. It felt like this was the answer to all our problems and now the marriage would finally be happy.

Let me put in another disclaimer here. Even though I went through six weeks of counseling and five years of Christian life coaching, today I do not recommend either to anyone, and I don't even believe in them. I have yet to find any so called "Christian counseling" or life coaching that isn't primarily founded on the deceptive Psychological principles of men, with some Scripture added to it to dress it up as Christian. I also have yet to meet a "Christian counselor" where it didn't become apparent after some time that they themselves were not walking in the fullness and freedom of Christ. That then becomes, the blind leading the blind. The fact is, most counseling simply doesn't work, and any results you do get are mostly temporary.

Let me say it plainly, there is absolutely no need whatsoever, at any time, under any circumstances to go beyond what God wrote in the Bible for the needs of your soul or spirit. Jesus Christ said that His words are spirit and they are life and I can personally testify that they are all we need to know and experience harmony in our souls and reconciliation with God in our spirit. He did not make any mistakes, and He did not leave out any so called "secrets" that we needed in order to be whole. The field of Psychology wasn't even created until 1879 and the millions of Christians living for the nearly 2000 years before that, never missed a single principle they needed to find fullness in Christ because they trusted completely in the living word of God. You cannot take the counterfeit Psychological principles of men, paint them over with Bible verses, and then expect God to honor them with the power of the Holy Spirit in your life.

Man simply cannot resist the temptation to add to God's word and principles, creating his own unique approach, or special sauce, but doing so is foolish and dangerous. If you would like to hear more on this subject along with all the major Bible passages that speak to this subject, please listen to my audio message on YouTube entitled, *"Stop Trusting in Man and Depend on God Alone."*

Nevertheless, I too saw some very convincing, but temporary results from my Christian counseling experience. Not only did it put me on a soulful and emotional high, but Jennifer immediately responded to this very happily and became peaceful towards me again. By taking the blame for everything, I was effectively absolving her of all her responsibility in the problems we were having in our marriage and that made her quite happy.

As impossible as it seems, by May of 2010, we were once again back being happily married and I was looking for ways to help her find something to sink her teeth into. For a long time, she had been wanting to do something outside of just being a stay at home mom. How ironic that she had a Psychology degree in organizational leadership. She had again been studying leadership and I invited her to co-author my Kickstart blog each week. Things were once again, going well. On May 13th, 2010, after I had completed the counseling program, she wrote the following words on my blog which went out to several thousand people. *"To my husband Michael, I'm so incredibly proud of the path that you are on and the person you are becoming. It is a privilege to be on this journey with you."*

I had still been trying to figure out what to do for a living, that wasn't revolving around sales or success training and so one night at dinner, I told her I had this idea to start a small video production company called "Sticky Story Productions". The idea was to leverage video storytelling to help entrepreneurs to solicit business and connect with their perfect customers by telling their authentic stories in an emotionally compelling way. She thought it was a good idea and within just weeks I already had my first few customers.

Our marriage was peaceable, but we were about to get out of balance spiritually again. My desire for ministry had been growing in the last few months and I was sharing much of it with Jennifer, in hopes that

she would want to come along and get closer to God with me. However, as I shared my burden to stop teaching watered down worldly principles through my Kickstart blog, and to instead share about my faith in Jesus Christ, she said, *“Let’s not be those people who wear our Christianity on our sleeve...let’s just live it.”* That sounded so noble and so righteous, and it’s the much better alternative to hypocrisy, but underneath that statement was a spirit of anti-Christ, who really wishes to disown Christ publicly, and to not suffer persecution for His name. For me, I had this growing burden to publicly confess my true faith in Christ, regardless of the consequences. People were watching me in these videos every day, but they had no idea about the most important part of my life, my faith and growing dependence on Jesus Christ.

Matthew 10:32-33 “Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. (33) But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.”

Once again, I found myself anxious to get her involved in her own ministry or purposeful work, as a distraction from her trying to control what I felt God might be calling me to do. To my great surprise, she had even started attending a small woman’s Bible study at one of our friends’ house and this gave me such hope that her attitude towards my ministry desires might soon change.

Two weeks later, right around the first of June, she came home from her Bible study with news that shocked me. They were going through a book called Captivating, by Stasi Eldridge, the wife of John Eldridge. In that book, Stasi apparently shared her own abortion story, and Jennifer told me that she shared hers with the group. I couldn’t believe it! I was so surprised and praised God that she had finally opened up and told something private and shameful to someone else. This was such a big change for her. She was being authentic for once, and not trying to keep her good girl image. It was already a shock that she was attending a Bible study, and now this had just totally blown me away. She told me that the ladies had pleaded with her to tell this story to others.

That very morning, when she told me about this, I had made our coffee and when I grabbed our cups, I was consciously aware of the fact that I grabbed a cup that said, *“Be the change you wish to see in the world.”* a very famous quote by Ghandi from India. That morning, I shared my burdens about wanting to do ministry work, and at one point she took her cup and pointed it at me, showing me the Ghandi quote, as if to encourage me. That’s when I told her that I thought she too should really think about ministering to other women through our abortion story, seeing how the ladies at her Bible study responded to it, and knowing how amazing it was that God had given us back, what we had thrown away, a second set of twins.

I agreed to do all the work to produce and tell the story and told her to seriously think and pray about it. After we were done talking, she left to go do some things in our home office and to check her email. Within just a few minutes, she was screaming from the other end of the house, *“Michael, Michael...come here...you have to see this!”*

To our amazement, when she opened her email and checked her junk email folder, there was one email in it. That one email was from a website which was campaigning to end abortion by the year 2020. We clicked on the website, watched their video on statistics and then we both agreed that a video on abortion statistics would not keep women from walking into an abortion clinic, but that a real-life story like hers, would. I told her to click on the contact button and right there on the right-hand side of the page was the quote, *“Be the change you wish to see in the World” – Ghandi.* We were both so blown away and we just knew this was a sign from God that Jennifer was supposed to tell her story and that we should do a story video.

About 45 minutes later, I heard her getting dressed and doing her hair in the bedroom. I went in to see where she was going and that’s when she said, *“I’m ready to tell the story.”* I couldn’t believe it and I was

just so elated. This is not something that the woman I was married to, would ever do. I knew something had wonderfully changed in her. I got so excited and immediately ran and started setting up the camera and lights and microphone, while she finished getting ready.

She came outside and sat down on the chair by the pool and we prayed and asked God's blessing on this story to help save the lives of thousands of little babies, and the hearts of women who will suffer so much death in their soul from abortion.

What happened in that interview was the most amazing thing I had ever seen in my marriage. She was more transparent than I had ever seen her, telling even parts of the story that I had never heard, like how she refused even to take a pain pill during the procedure because she never wanted to forget what she had done. As the tears were streaming down her face, I was bawling on the other side of the camera, trying so hard to let her get it all out without just jumping up and going over and hugging her. I finally got the opportunity to hear how painful this experience was for her, and to feel her pain. It was extraordinary. I had goosebumps all over my body and I knew this story was the most powerful and authentic thing I have ever seen on video.

When the interview was finished, we both just hugged and held each other as we cried, and I told her over and over how proud of her I was for doing this. We were both moved to tears and emotions like never before. To me, this felt like the heavenly climax of our entire marriage and the redemption of all the chaos and evil we had endured over the years. It was such an amazing moment that a Holy hush came over both of us, and we just stopped talking.

A few days later, while working on editing her interview footage, I noticed she started becoming nervous about telling the story publicly. She started expressing doubts and fears about telling the story, saying, "*I never even told my parents this story and now I'm about to tell the world.*" Each day she saw me working on the video, I could see she was becoming more and more fearful and reluctant. I reminded her of how powerful our story was in that God was so merciful to us in having given us back what we threw away. I also reminded her of the confirmation we had just received before she agreed to tell the story. And, I assured her that she would have full control over the video story after I did the initial edits.

A few days later, I noticed that she had once again started becoming very angry and critical after watching a news story that was talking about the affairs of Tiger Woods and former Senator Jonathan Edwards. She started spewing condemning and judgmental words towards them both, as if she wanted to throw them both into hell right then. I was so disappointed to see this coming back and one morning as we sat down for coffee, I very gently confronted her anger by asking her how could we expect God to bless our ministry efforts and our family, if we were carrying a critical spirit and judgmental attitude towards others like this?

Very calmly, she sat back in her chair and without saying a word, she just began to think. I was amazed that she didn't immediately return and accuse me, but instead seemed to humbly receive what I had just said and took it in for consideration. After about a minute of sitting silently leaned back in her chair, she leaned forward, and said, "*You know, I think I just figured out why I've been so angry these past 15 years.*" She paused, and I thought to myself, could this possibly be happening? Could she actually be admitting that she's had an anger problem, and could she be about to take responsibility for it?

I was sitting on the edge of my chair calming waiting to hear what she was going to say next, when all of sudden, her face frowned up and she began screaming like she was devil possessed, "*You are the reason I have been so angry all these years...You were the one who drove me to that f'ing abortion clinic and left me there all alone...it was your f'ing mom who told me not to do this to her son and to get an abortion...you did this to me...you left me there and wanted nothing to do with the abortion then, and now all of sudden*

you are so interested in telling my story...you know what...you will not be telling my story. I have already contacted a video guy at our church who is going to help me tell the story and you will have nothing to do with it."

Oh, man, did that ever hurt, especially the part about her asking a stranger to edit our abortion story, rather than me. I knew that was said to intentionally hurt me so badly, but I received God's grace in one of the most incredible ways I had so far. I was able to just sit there calmly and take it all right on the chin and not say anything back while she spewed. It was amazing, the man who hated being falsely accused more than anything in the world, was able to sit there calmly and not even flinch. I took the liberty to remind her of my side of the story from the events that took place all those many years ago, but she couldn't hear it.

Unknowingly, when I agreed to help her tell her story, I was stepping on a spiritual hornet's nest. This story was so powerful, and I believe the devil must have known that if it got out, it would indeed have an impact on the number of people he could murder, and the number of women's hearts that he could destroy through abortion. I also believe it would have brought some real healing to Jennifer's heart as she watched how God redeemed our terrible sin of murder. The devil is at war with such affronts to his dominion of darkness.

1 Peter 5:8 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

Ephesians 6:11-12 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. (12) For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

To stop us from telling the story, he took her completely captive over just a few days by his flaming arrows of doubt and shame and fear. Just days earlier, we lovingly embraced over God's redemption of our sin and terrible loss. She had even said on camera that she didn't take so much as a Tylenol during the surgery, because she wanted to never forget what *she* had done. Now, after several days of flaming arrows, the devil had successfully removed any sense of personal responsibility from her mind, leaving her to now shift all the blame to my mother and I, in terrible bitterness.

Hebrews 12:15 See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

Over the next several weeks, our life was once again an absolute hell in that house. She once again began accusing me of everything I had done wrong in the past 14 years, even now accusing me of being lazy because I wanted to serve God, rather than keep the lavish lifestyle we had.

Exodus 5:17 Pharaoh said, "Lazy, that's what you are—lazy! That is why you keep saying, 'Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD.'

Just weeks later, on July 15th, 2010, she took our five children and moved out of our big house and back into our first home, which her parent's had bought for a retirement home. While she was going back and forth to get her stuff, she said the most vicious and evil things that she had ever said to me in our entire marriage, even one point telling me I was worth more to her dead than alive, because I had a million-dollar life insurance policy.

All while knowingly being recorded, she screamed at me, assuring me that her parents were rich and they were going to slay me in court, even screaming that I was going to be a f'ing homeless loser by the time they got done with me and that I was going to have to pay up now, or I was going to go to jail. She screamed

these things in right in front of the children, to the point that my daughter Chelsea came to me in fear and said, “Daddy, are you really going to jail?” I must leave out many details, but it was horrible. I became so afraid of her screaming and raging at me that after she moved out, I began sleeping with a knife next to my bed. Two weeks later, on July 30th, 2010, I was served with divorce papers that were filled with all kinds of terrible accusations.

My fears were real, but they were completely unwarranted because my loving Heavenly Father was in control of every bit of this, but I didn’t yet realize it. However, as I continued to look to Him and ask Him for help, He was going to strengthen me in all kinds of ways by showing me He was absolutely in control of all men and circumstances on earth.

Exodus 12:41 NIV At the end of the 430 years, TO THE VERY DAY, all the Lord’s divisions left Egypt.

Amazingly, this was the second of three major events in my life that I would later discover took place in exactly nine months TO THE VERY DAY. The first one was the collapse of the Lord’s Gym which occurred on May 22nd, 2002, exactly nine months TO THE DAY after we opened it on August 22nd, 2001. The second one was the divorce, which she filed on July 30th, 2010, exactly nine-months TO THE DAY after I fully surrendered my entire life, family, and will to Christ on October 30th, 2009. I have jokingly called these two events like having “birth in reverse”, but they are powerful glimpses of just how powerful and Sovereign our faithful God is.

After I was served the divorce papers, things were about to completely change in my relationship with God. I had just been set free from Egypt and now too the Pharaoh’s grip, but just like the Pharaoh came back after the Israelites, God was about to harden Jennifer’s heart and have her come at me in even worse ways than anyone could imagine. Nevertheless, God was now directly working for His Magnificent Glory, and as the enemy was going to be allowed to come into my life like a terrible flood, the Lord was about to raise up a standard against Him that would amaze every single person in my life who saw it. Without that flood, there would be no Glory for God. When God wants to show off His power and glory, He raises up big problems and impossible circumstances.

Exodus 14:4 NIV And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will pursue them. But I will gain glory for myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord.”

Twenty chapters in, we are now getting to my long-awaited favorite parts of the story. God did not answer any of my prayers to save Jennifer’s heart or our marriage, and in fact, things are about to get even worse for me as I enter a long period in the wilderness. However, rising above the increased afflictions coming will be the astonishing accounts of God’s presence and grace in my life, as I began to respond in faith and obedience to His instructions. This is where I begin to learn to daily walk with God and where I leave behind 19 years of carnal Christianity, in order to become a spiritual Christian.

There is no way to share all that God has done, and I certainly can’t share all of the details of the suffering which happened, but I will share the major points and I believe that Jesus is saying even now what He once said in John 5:20, “You will all be amazed.”

PART TWO: The Spiritual Christian Years

Chapter 20

Trusting God in the Wilderness

“Faith grows during storms. Remember, when you see a person of great spiritual stature, the road you must travel to walk with him is not one where the sun always shines, and wildflowers always bloom. Instead, the way is a steep, rocky, and narrow path, where the winds of hell will try to knock you off your feet, and where sharp rocks will cut you, prickly thorns will scratch your face, and poisonous snakes will slither and hiss all around you.” – E.A. Kilbourne

When I first read the autobiographies of John Bunyan and Madame Guyon (properly pronounced Gee-yaunnn), I was encouraged by the fact that they too had suffered greatly for their faith in Christ. Then, there came a second and most unexpected experience. Because I am a feeler, I became fatigued reading their stories when I realized their suffering never ended, but instead just got worse and worse and worse.

2 Corinthians 4:10-12 We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

I had never heard of anyone that suffered as many flaming arrows of doubt and accusation from the devil about his salvation as John Bunyan did, nor had I ever heard of anyone who went to jail twice for a total of twelve years for refusing to stop preaching at his own church directly from the Bible. Also, I had never heard of anyone suffering so much in the cruelest of ways from their own family and their supposed spiritual leaders, as Madame Guyon did. To me, they both seemed like they were modern day Job's, especially Madame Guyon, who in my opinion suffered quite a bit more than Bunyan did. Reading her story caused me to almost stumble in my own faith a few times. I remember reading and saying, *“Oh God, why would you allow her to go through THAT much suffering.”*

I kept reading her story, looking for that happy ending of relief where she finally gets free of her external suffering and afflictions, but it never came. Instead, around every other dark corner was another devil waiting to unleash his ruthless fury on her. I grew increasingly fatigued hearing about the worst mother-in-law I had ever heard of, and being filled with outrage at the non-stop evil things she did to her daughter-in-law. However, what kept me going was seeing the amazing amounts of grace God weaved through all her crosses. Just as God promised in His word, He was able to make all grace abound to her so that she could not only rise above all those afflictions, but also abound continually in every good work (2 Corinthians 9:8). Those were the parts of her story that kept me going and eventually left me amazed and filled with admiration for her great love and faith in Christ.

By the end of her story, I not only hadn't heard of anyone who had suffered as much as her, but I also hadn't heard of any who received as much grace to embrace her crosses as she did. I may not agree with all her doctrines, since she came out of Roman Catholicism, but I know that woman loved her God because she obeyed his commands and took up her cross daily for Him (John 14:21-23, 1 John 5:3). Incidentally, it was encouraging to see that she began separating from some of the Catholic doctrine and traditions as she moved into the deeper spiritual life of loving Christ deeply from her heart. She separated from the Catholic doctrine

of salvation by works and instead preached salvation by faith through God's grace. She also was no longer able to participate in vocal prayers, confession, and other sacraments which she had known for so long in Catholicism. Her love and obedience to Christ was pulling her away from the dead religion she had grown up in, and the more she pulled away the more she was persecuted. She was thrown into prison for teaching people to pray personally and internally to God, rather than the mindless, heartless, repetitive prayers amongst the congregation.

In the end, I closed her book humbled and inspired, praising God for a woman who learned how to walk with God like she did, a woman who not only embraced her heavy cross for Christ, but who also grew to love it. It was hard to read her story and still believe that God does not have favorites, because she was clearly so dear to Him. Many people will no doubt want to meet Job when they get to heaven, including me, but I believe we'll have to wait because he'll likely still be waiting in an even longer line to meet Madame Guyon, the one whom was also called "God's Princess". There's no doubt that Job had the worst two days of suffering that anyone has ever had, but Job's suffering only lasted for a few months according to Job 7:3, whereas hers lasted her entire lifetime, starting at the age of four.

I share this because I know some will also experience fatigue as they read my dramatic, seemingly never-ending story. After 18 months of writing, I too am fatigued from having to recall, organize, and relive the unbelievable details and evils of my own story, and especially knowing that there is still so much left to tell. However, there is so much more to this story from this point forward than just seemingly senseless suffering. Just like the lives of faithful sufferers for Christ in the last two-thousand years, I have personally seen that willful crucifixion on my cross for Christ has led to the blessed promise of resurrection life in my heart and spirit. You will get to hear and see astonishing amounts of God's mercy and grace, if you keep going on from here in this book.

I have been laboring for 18 months, longing for this day to arrive, where I can share with you the most incredible parts of my journey with God. This, the second part of my story, is where both the devil and God became very intentional and active in my life. To maximize the spiritual impact, while minimizing the amount of time it takes to read it, *after* this chapter, I am going to change my writing style. I am now going to switch to a more chronologically ordered, summary accounting of just the facts as they occurred in real-time, much like what you see in George Muller's autobiography. From time to time, I may provide some additional commentary to explain certain parts of the story, but otherwise it will be summary excerpts taken directly from my audio journal recordings on the dates they happened.

So far in the story, I have had to rely heavily on emails and sporadic journal entries I wrote, to tell the story accurately. However, starting in 2011, all the way up to the story of my marriage to Persis in Hyderabad, India, and us coming back to live in the United States on December 25th 2016, I recorded 2,692 audio recordings detailing all that was happening and what I was learning along the way.

I estimate that I recorded hundreds of God's faithful answers to my prayers as they happened, including a few times where I recorded my actual prayers that were later answered exactly as I had prayed. I have dozens of recordings of the Lord telling me of things that were going to happen before they did, so that you too will believe when you later here how they came true.

John 14:29 I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe.

However, and this is a big HOWEVER, it wasn't just God's incredible guidance, divine providence, and answered prayers that I captured. I also recorded my greatest ignorance's, my biggest failures, my most enticing temptations, my most difficult spiritual battles, my darkest sins, my most painful persecutions, and my scariest doubts. What I captured in vivid color, thanks be to God, is authentic Christianity and what it

looks like in real life for a Christian to learn to walk hand and hand with His God, being prepared and tested for a ministry. I said at the beginning of the book, and I will confidently say it again here, there is NO WAY that I can overhype what our awesome God has done in the rest of this story. It is six years of astonishing grace to the chief of all fools, all captured in real time and written down now for your encouragement in the faith.

The way I see it, it would be so fitting for the Lord to take me home after I finish this book, and I wouldn't be surprised at all, if He did. That's how much of an exclamation mark on my life and walk with the Lord, finishing this story for His glory will feel like. As we are currently building our Tiny House on wheels, my mom keeps saying at various stages, *"you must be getting so excited."* I always reply the same, *"No mom, not really...it's just a smaller simpler place to live...if you want to see me excited, wait until I finish this book. That will be the greatest accomplishment of my life because it is how I can bring the most glory to my Father!"* I have already warned Persis to be prepared for that day because I think I might just be overwhelmed with emotion and fulfillment!

The devil has tried multiple times to stop it, tormenting me along the way, not to mention how much I have suffered physically in my neck, shoulders, back and hands while writing it. Upon its completion, I will feel as though I have finished the work my Father gave me to do, in first learning how to walk with Him, and then by telling others a detailed account of all that He did in my life and how He had mercy on me. I feel as though I will be able to echo the words of my Lord after His three and a half years of ministry on earth...

John 17:4 I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.

I still have a long way to go to get to 2018 in the story, so let's get started. And, don't worry, I'm not going to share every detail from the 2600 recordings, starting in the next chapter, but I am going to share a lot and I think you will really be blessed as the journey develops.

Introduction to Part Two

After overcoming a very ugly childhood, filled with dysfunction, abuse, and constant instability, I began chasing the sense of freedom I felt I had before the age of nine, when my parents divorced. I also went in pursuit of the love and acceptance I desired from others, through the making of large amounts of money in sales. Soon, I began trusting in money to make my life happy and to deliver me from every trouble. I was a professing Christian and felt a sincere love for God, but I was terribly deceived not knowing the difference between knowing about God, versus knowing Him and walking with Him. My Christianity was better described as "Myselfianity" because I lived according to my own will, and as if my life and happiness were primarily up to me. It seems to me that I was trying to use Christ and my Christian faith like good luck charms, hoping God would bless all my plans if I just remained a decent person and was regularly found in "church" serving and giving my tithes. I knew nothing of the internal righteousness of the heart or the fullness in Christ available in the New Covenant, upon absolute surrender to his Lordship in my life.

For many years, God allowed adversity after adversity into my life, to break me, but just like Jacob, the unyielding horse in my heart continued to run far and wide in accordance with my will and my ignorance. Eventually, just like God used the Pharaoh to break the Israelites and show them their desperate need for a deliverer, He was going to harden the heart of my wife and turn her against me viciously, to crush me and show me my own desperate need for a deliverer. I had an unyielding strong spirit, but God was going to cause her to have an even stronger and more unyielding spirit, which would eventually break mine.

"High natures must be thunder-scarred
With many scarring wrongs!"

Nothing unmarred, with struggles hard
Can make the soul's sinews strong.

For 19 years I had been calling myself a Christian. I had a good heart and a sincere love for God, but in my stubbornness and ignorance, I was living like a deceived fool. On October 30th, 2009, after achieving what I deemed to be the good life and then being left with zero peace in my heart and my marriage, I finally came before God, poor in spirit, in absolute surrender. I cried out to Him even saying, "*Lord, even if you need to take my wife and children from me, I give them to you to do with as you please.*" It not only pleased the Lord to take them from me, but it was also going to please the Lord to crush me, just like it says He was pleased to do to Job in Job 16:12 and also to Jesus in Isaiah 53:10. God had set me free from Egypt, but now He was going to give me a dreadful wilderness experience, which I didn't yet realize was preparation for the Promised Land.

Deuteronomy 8:15-16 He led you through the vast and dreadful desert, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. (16) He gave you manna to eat in the desert, something your fathers had never known, to humble and to test you so that in the end it might go well with you.

The wilderness for me was going to be a place of stripping and the removing of everything that I had ever put my trust in or depended on, including my relationships. It was through this stripping process that I was going to learn how to literally throw myself at God's mercy and to trust Him, as a child, for even the very basic needs and decisions in my life. It was a dreadful place where I would not only lose my pride, but also my dignity. God was going to begin doing a much deeper heart surgery on me in this season.

Matthew 18:3-4 And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. (4) Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Like the Israelites, I was going to have to learn to survive on "manna from heaven". God was going to feed me, instruct me, and guide me with daily spiritual bread from heaven, through His word, sometimes in astonishing ways, over the next three and a half years. Other than basic shelter and food, I would have nothing else over those years, including material possessions or my freedom. This season was going to be the fulfillment of my desire to surrender everything to Him, and to become more like Christ, but it wasn't going to happen without much pain and darkness to overcome.

Job 6:1-4 Then Job replied: (2) "If only my anguish could be weighed and all my misery be placed on the scales! (3) It would surely outweigh the sand of the seas— no wonder my words have been impetuous. (4) The arrows of the Almighty are in me, my spirit drinks in their poison; God's terrors are marshaled against me.

On July 30th, 2010, I was served divorce papers, and within just weeks I had to be out of the house we were living in. While packing up my belongings and preparing to move out of the house, I suddenly had this strong impression to go sit down on the porch, right at that very moment, and finally confess to my subscribers that I loved Jesus Christ and that He was a big part of my life. For the longest time I had felt like I wasn't being honest with them because I kept that part of my life mostly hidden, since my subscribers were mostly business people. For many months, I felt the growing desire to open up about my relationship with Jesus, but Jennifer had consistently opposed me doing this. Now that she was out of my life and no longer had any say about it, I decided to obey the prompting and filmed a video that day. I was sweaty and dirty from moving but I knew I needed to do it right then. I started off by saying, "*I haven't been totally honest with you because there is a major part of my life that I haven't told you about yet.*" I recorded the

whole video sharing my faith in Christ and planned to post it in a few days after I got moved out and settled somewhere else. It was going to be several months before it ever made it up online and it wasn't going to happen without a scary assault from hell trying to prevent me from doing it.

I was still so stunned by the divorce and in survival mode, just trying to figure out how to take care of my basic needs, while I also anticipated how ugly this divorce was going to get. Since she controlled our money and had shut down our personal account, I had no checking account and no access to any real money, outside of what I could earn through my very new video story telling business. My best friend was living with a professional golf caddie in Lake Nona, who also agreed to let me rent a room temporarily until I could find a place of my own. I lived there for about six weeks and there were three spiritually significant events that happened during that time.

Shortly after moving in and just taking a few days to do nothing but rest, the depravity of my new financial situation hit me hard. I was on my morning walk down the sidewalk of this beautiful neighborhood when suddenly I realized how poor I was now. I felt like such a loser and like I didn't even deserve to be walking down the sidewalks of this beautiful gated community, because I no longer belonged to that class of society.

Just weeks earlier, I had moved out of a nearly million-dollar home, and now I was confronting the reality that for the previous three days, my checking account balance was only \$26, which was all the money I had in the whole world. Contrasting memories of my past financial glory days began flooding into my mind. I remembered the picture of me holding that check for \$255k in January of 2007 and the tears just began to flow as I fell deep into self-pity.

Most people respect people with money, and for several years I had believed that God was going to make me a millionaire so that I would have credibility and people would listen to what I had to say about Him. Walking down that sidewalk, I remember thinking, "*it's over for me...I'm a useless failure to God now.*" I mumbled a few words to God in between my tears and that's when I heard Him say to my spirit, "*You are far more useful to me now, with \$26 in your account, than you ever were with \$250,000.*" I was still so spiritually deceived at that time, that I didn't even understand what He meant. My eyes had been darkened by my love of money, just as Jesus warned about in Matthew 6:19-24, and as a result I had no understanding of the differences between the old and new covenants. I still incorrectly believed that the old covenant promises of material prosperity were the primary mark of God's blessing on a life. This is exact opposite of what Jesus and the disciples taught.

Luke 4:18 "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.

Luke 6:24 "But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort.

Luke 6:20 Looking at his disciples, he said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

James 2:5 Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?

1 Timothy 6:5-6 [they are] men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain. (6) But godliness with contentment is great gain.

I couldn't see this truth about money yet, so the fact that I now had no money at all, made me feel like a complete spiritual failure. Nevertheless, I knew God had spoken to my spirit and I was encouraged because I knew He was with me and guiding me.

Another great encouragement during this time happened when I heard a message from Charles Stanley talking about how he learned to see every adversity and affliction that came his way, as tools in God's hands to shape him into the character of Christ. That message was so encouraging to hear, and it gave some much-needed meaning to all the evil and affliction I was facing.

Then, I had one other really significant experience during those six-weeks. One of Jennifer and I's closest friends was a Christian couple we had known since the days of the Lord's Gym, whom I just adored. I'll call them Bob and Susan for anonymity. Bob was an Orthodontist and Susan was a stay at home mom with four children. Bob and I had become great friends and he had even given me a full Orthodontic treatment with braces for free. We went to all our children's birthday parties and we had many dinner parties and date nights together over the years. Bob and I even went to several Christian men's events together and I truly loved and respected him. Jennifer became friends with Susan as we had spent time together over the years and was really her only friend the entire time I was married to her. Jennifer never had a single girlfriend, the entire time we were married, except Susan.

Before Jennifer filed for divorce, she began slandering me to Susan in attempt to win her over, knowing there was soon going to be a divorce. One day, out of suspicion, I checked Jennifer's email and found an email from Susan which said, *"I'm so sorry this has happened to you. We both knew you couldn't take it much longer and that this day was coming."* Jennifer had been convincing Susan that I was bi-polar and refused to get help and that I was a danger to the entire family. I found another email where Susan had planted a reckless seed in Jennifer's mind saying, *"When Michael left that night, do you think maybe he was having an affair?"* This was about a night, years earlier, where I got so mad at Jennifer that I left the house, taking my pillow and some clothes, intentionally not telling her where I was going. I went and spent the night with my friend Larry, but the devil used this an opportunity to plant another seed of false accusation.

I was so outraged when I read these things, and I now knew Jennifer had been lying and slandering me to Susan to get her on her side so that when she divorced me, it would look like she was justified as a Christian woman, and so she would have someone in her corner afterwards. All our friends, with the exception of Susan knew the truth about Jennifer's accusations and were siding with me, and Jennifer knew that. Jennifer was acting like the shrewd manager in Luke 16, who knew he was going to lose his job, so he schemed to make some friends in a dishonest way as quickly as he could so that afterwards he would have someone to run to and help him.

To find these things out about Susan burned my heart badly. It was another terrible betrayal from such a close friend and I was so angry with her for calling herself a Christian and then egging this on and saying such irresponsible and reckless things to Jennifer. I was also starting to get angry about Bob because he wasn't standing up for the truth, but was instead being silent regarding the recklessness of his gossiping wife.

One night I got my voice recorder out and made a recording to Bob and Susan, confronting her on this evil and asking her how it felt to be the woman who helped break up a family of seven, knowing that five small children were now going to suffer for years because of this. I was so hurt, and I couldn't wait for Susan to feel some of the pain I was now feeling. I wanted her to feel so ashamed of the ungodly thing she had done.

I made the recording that evening but since I was so emotional, I decided not to send it until the next day. By the next morning, after my prayer walk, the Lord had changed my heart and perspective completely. I thought about the fact that I had already realized that this divorce, although still extremely painful, was going to be one of the greatest gifts God had ever given me. Then I asked myself, *"how in the world can I be so angry at the woman God used to help separate me from this marriage of death?"* If I didn't want the

marriage back anymore, and if I was truly blessed to be free from her, how could I then turn around and be so angry at the person God used to help free me from her? To do so would be extremely double-minded and hypocritical. So, instead of sending them a recording, I decided to forgive them both from my heart.

Such amazing peace filled my heart and it was truly an incredible moment. Instead of giving the devil an opportunity to bind me up because of my unforgiveness, I decided to trust God and to forgive Susan of the offense. I think this was the first major time I was able to recognize how God intentionally uses evil for good. It would be sometime before I communicated with Bob and Susan again personally because I didn't trust Susan while we were in this divorce, but I remained free through forgiveness.

A Season of Vulnerabilities

In September of 2010, I rented a three-bedroom house right across the street from the children's school. It was wonderful because I got to visit them and eat lunch with them often. It was a very special time for all of us. My best friend left the golf-caddies house also and moved in with me. We both were single, and we were hungry for more of God, reading our Bible's each morning, going on long prayer walks and focusing on building our little video story telling business.

Spiritually, this was a very dangerous time for me in several ways. I was very needy in almost every area of my life and desperate to see something good happen. This left me vulnerable to making unwise decisions and misreading circumstances that began to happen in my life. I began thinking once again that these "open doors" and truly incredible circumstances must have certainly been from God. You will recall the incredibly convincing circumstances surrounding the Get Motivated seminars opportunity, and how everything seemed to be lining up as if it were indeed God's plan. Nevertheless, after I inquired to God in prayer, He told me that if I said yes to it, it would be the end of my usefulness to Him. The circumstances had lined up so convincingly, but only in order to test me, not because they were evidence of God's will. Eve chose the fruit (which God intentionally made pleasing to the eye), and Lot chose Sodom, based primarily on what they saw with their eyes, not based on the guidance or will of God, who can see what we cannot see. I too needed more practice to fully learn this important lesson.

I learned an important principle from A.B. Simpson, who was A.W. Tozer's mentor, much later than I would have liked. Simpson taught that you must not move forward on something until three things are all in agreement, the circumstances, the word of God, and your peace. If you move forward based solely on the circumstances, which many people do, you will almost always live to regret it.

In these last days, I believe the devil is doing far more "god things" than God Himself is doing, and God is allowing it. That means that the devil is opening far more doors of "opportunity" and performing far more signs, miracles, and wonders all around us than God is. These are the days we are now living in, as things begin to wind down and wrap up (See Mark 13:5-6, 2 Pet 3:3, 1 Tim 4:1, 2 Tim 3:1-5,13, 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12). I'll share three specific stories from this season of my life that show how important it is not to assume something is a "God thing", just because the circumstances line up amazingly well.

The Ministry of My Dreams

Before the divorce happened, I had a dream to one day own a 100-acre Christian motocross park, where we could give young boys something extreme to sink their teeth into besides drugs, parties, and trouble. In addition to basic life skills and character development, the goal was to also inspire their faith in Christ. That dream seemed dead to me this side of the divorce, but one day while on a walk, I had this strong vision in my mind about it that seemed so real. My best friend and I were both in the vision and I told him that I felt we were still supposed to pursue this and believe God for it.

Exactly six nights later, he and I got excited talking about the possibility of it one day happening. The very next day, I continued in my reading in a book about finding and living your story for God's glory. The chapter was on the dreams that we have for our life. Within minutes of me sitting down to read, I read the following words and jumped up screaming, running into the house, waking up my best friend from a nap because I could not wait to tell him this. Here is what I read in that book and you tell me, what are the chances? The author writes, "*We must always be willing to go further than our own group and pursue the passions that take us into other groups of people like **dirt-bike racers**, church choirs, abused women, and so forth. We must dream dreams that are connected to a specific population.*"

I could hardly believe my eyes and I immediately took a picture of the page, which is still in my journal today. At the time, there was no way anyone could convince me this was just a coincidence. We both just praised the Lord over and over. There's only one small little problem. None of this was God's will! I was convinced this was from God, but the very last thing my Father in heaven was ever going to allow me to do, much less ask me to do, would be to start a ministry around dirt bikes, the very things I idolized and made Him jealous with for many years.

In this example, the circumstances were truly lined up and nothing short of unbelievable, and I certainly had peace about it in my carnal heart, but this did not line up with the true word and heart of God. I didn't yet know the Word or Father's ways well enough. Instead I was listening to the false teaching of a man who wrote a book about writing *your own* destiny and using your own passions for God's glory. I believed I could have my dirt bike pleasures and God too, but how wrong was I.

Luke 14:33 In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.

Worldly passions and pleasures are no more sanctified, when we say we are using them or employing them for God's glory, than the US dollar is sanctified because we wrote, "In God We Trust" on it. I do not believe we can use the man-made pleasures and entertainments of men of this world for God's glory any more than we can things like drunkenness, love of money, sexual immorality, or idols. The only time these things ever bring God glory is when they are in our testimonies as things we have set down or walked away from because we realized we had idolatry in our hearts. God sees the world and all its pleasures as another lover competing for our hearts. How then will God allow us to use another lover, which makes us an adulterer, to bring Him glory?

James 4:4-5 NASB You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. (5) Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: "He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us"?

Here again was that false thinking where I thought I could take whatever *my* gifts, talents, dreams and desires were, and simply employ them in ministry for God's kingdom. How helpful and wise it is to realize that God despises the things which godless men in this world love, even when we try to sanctify them by putting a fish emblem or cross on them.

Luke 16:15 He said to them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight.

It was still going to be some time before I realized that God considered my love for motocross idolatry.

Vulnerable to the Opposite Sex

Another place I became exceptionally vulnerable, and where God was going to allow me to be repeatedly tested was regarding the opposite sex. For many months after Jennifer filed for divorce, I still bounced back and forth between being so glad to be free from her, yet also still holding on to some hope that she would finally break and get her heart right with God, and then be reconciled back to me in marriage. Even after all the evil and hate she showed me, I knew I would have still taken her back if she repented and it proved to be authentic. As a result, I never once thought about being in another relationship, nor could I.

That all changed on November 8th, 2010 when I unexpectedly met a woman named Sara during a radio interview at WDBO 580 AM radio station in Orlando, FL. I was there to be interviewed about using story telling in business, and she was also being interviewed about empowering professional women. She was quite attractive and very humble. She was interviewed before me, and as I listened to her she began sharing part of her story, which started with a summarized version of her rather dramatic divorce story and how it played such a role in her current passions.

She had been married to a morning news host from a major news network, when not too long into the marriage, he had an affair with one of the guests on his show and got the woman pregnant. I was so moved by her transparency and her lack of bitterness and it soon became apparent she was also a Christian. Almost immediately the thoughts began running through my mind, *“Could this just be a coincidence that I met her today?”* She was adorable and really grabbed my attention and respect. After our interview, I asked her if she would have coffee with me to talk more about how she handled the divorce since I was going through mine right then. For the next several days, as I waited for her to contact me about meeting, my mind began spinning with anxious thoughts, to the point I had to get on my knees and ask God to forgive me.

Finally, she contacted me, and we met for lunch. She treated me with such kindness and empathy for my divorce situation, even to the point of tearing up, that it made me feel like I had a strong connection to her. We talked about God and how she wanted to be closer to him, having slipped away from her previous devotion, and I was so excited because I had just prayed for her in that exact way, that I might be an influence on her to go deeper with God.

After that meeting, I became even more anxious because I felt a strong connection to her and yet my friends and my mom were all telling me to hold back until I had a divorce certificate. I felt that in God’s eyes I was already divorced when Jennifer abandoned the marriage and took the children, not to mention that she admitted to having an emotional affair during our marriage. I also felt like God might have put Sara and I together with the intent of match making and I was afraid to miss the opportunity He might be giving me. I already knew that the State of Florida considers you single, both in finances and relationally, when the other spouse files an uncontested divorce, but I remained uncertain how the Lord felt about it, so I asked God to please give me a sign if I should say something to Sara about how I was feeling. The very next morning, the Lord was going to give me that sign.

CHAPTER 21

Getting Ahead of God’s Promise for a New Wife

To me, there was no way that my meeting Sara at that radio station had just been a random coincidence, and especially after having such strong feelings of connection with her at our lunch meeting. The problem was now whether I should tell her how I was feeling, while I was still without a certificate of divorce from

Jennifer. My friends and family were saying I should wait, but my anxious heart was saying “*don’t miss this possible opportunity!*”. Driven by the fear of missing a possible God ordained opportunity with her, I asked the Lord to please give me some sort of a sign to let me know what I should do. The following is a journal entry I wrote the very next day about what happened.

November 12th, 2010 – (Journal entry)

I went for my morning walk at 5:50am. I began listening to some worship songs and my heart was very soft before the Lord. I began to weep, as I thought about his love for me and our relationship. I thought about Sara, and I began praying for her. As I kept walking, I kept myself in worship of the Lord and was just enjoying this time so much, but I also told God how lonely and how sad I was. I asked him if I would ever be loved and if I would ever have a wife again that I could love, or would I always be alone?

As I came up to the lake, just before the sun was rising, I saw a single bird, sitting in the middle of the lake, all by itself. As I looked at it, it was like God just spoke to my spirit, “That is you, right now.” I felt like it symbolized me...all alone. It was a deeply significant moment. So much so, that I took off my rubber arm band, with my phone in it, so I could take a picture. This is the actual picture, from that morning, taken November 12th, 2010 at 6:20 am.



As I walked away, I said, in a half way serious “Gideon” type moment, “God, if when I came back by here, you made it so that there were two birds sitting in the middle of that lake, that would be a sign to let me know that I will love again and one day have someone to love me.”

36 min. later, I was returning home on my walk and approaching the lake again. As I got closer, I began to think excitedly about the idea of there actually being two birds in the middle of that lake. As I got close enough to begin seeing some of the water, I noticed a family of ducks entering the lake. My heart sank, and I said, “No, that’s not the right kind of birds, God.” As I got closer and closer, I began to anticipate being able to see the center of the lake, which was being hidden behind a set of bushes and a large electrical power box, just off the golf course. I couldn’t stop my frustrated thoughts and I said again, “those ducks aren’t supposed to be there”.

Just then, the center of the lake came into full view. The ducks had made it out of the way and to my utter amazement, there were now two of those exact same kinds of birds sitting right in the middle of that lake,

all by themselves. They were mates for sure...so cute, just sitting right beside one another right in the middle of that big lake. I immediately began to cry in amazement. I bent over, putting my hands on my knees to cry and catch my breath. Suddenly it hit me. "Take a picture." This is the second picture taken 36 minutes later at 6:56 am.



I felt certain it was God showing me, once again, he cares about the things that are important to me...and he was going to provide another wife for me. I can't predict the outcome, but I was absolutely stunned by this event. I took it from that, that I could tell Sara about how I was feeling. One way or another, I know the Lord was showing me something. About 90 seconds after I took the pictures, the birds began swimming away from the center of the lake...the small window of opportunity after 36 minutes of walking, was staggering...God is SOOO good. I cried so much and just kept thanking the Lord for all these things he keeps doing to communicate to me. Praise the Lord in Heaven!! No one would ever believe these things, if I didn't document them. I'm collecting evidence of God's directing my footsteps for my children!

Five days later, despite that wonderful sign in answer to my prayer, I was still having doubts about speaking to Sara and my anxieties had built up to the point of turning into outright frustration and anger. I want to share this very raw and lengthy journal entry with you, which I wrote at 3am in the morning, so you can see how anxious and fretful I was getting, and how much weakness I had in this area.

NOVEMBER 17TH 2010

It's 2:52 AM...I can't sleep AGAIN and I feel like saying damn it!!!! I knew this was going to happen tonight. I sent a text to Sara last night, saying "How was your day Princess (her last name)? Just checking in on you." She never replied back and so of course, now the devil is kicking my butt with thoughts..."You screwed up...she has misinterpreted your text...you are going to scare the hell out of her with using the word Princess." Of course, I was implying that she is a princess because she is a daughter of the Most High King, but I'm now awake experiencing anxiety about this whole "Sara" thing again and now I'm starting to feel just MAD about it all.

All of this anxiousness and journaling seems RIDICULOUS to me...like I'm torturing myself...like I'm some immature child who is about to write a note..."Do you like me...check the box". I have been wanting to pick up the phone every day and call Sara to politely and delicately let her know about my feelings (not that I'm in love with her, but that I'm curious about what happened that day and what it might mean for someday in the future). I have had no plans of violating my Marriage Covenant...but that covenant is already over in my mind. My wife sued me for divorce and has been so unbelievably unfaithful and hurtful to me. The State of Florida legally sees me as single now, from a finance and relational perspective, so how am I guilty

of meeting Sara...I DIDN'T PLAN THIS....I wasn't on some dating site or at some bar looking for a date...I wasn't looking for anything!

Of course, my best friend, my Mom and Larry are all telling me not to tell Sara about my feelings, until I have a certificate of divorce. Honest to goodness, I don't have any peace about that anymore...it's causing me super anxiety to keep this inside, like I have a dirty secret or I'm being dishonest or I'm out of line. NO I AM NOT. I have done nothing wrong damn it!!! I have been faithful to my wife...BIG TIME....I have loved my wife...BIG TIME...I tried everything possible for YEARS to keep that relationship alive and to try to make her happy and SHE HAS THROWN ME AWAY LIKE GARBAGE.....SHE WAS UNFAITHFUL TO ME...NOT ME TO HER....AN EMOTIONAL AFFAIR IS AN affair and I'M MAD AS HELL right now that I am the one having these guilty feelings and feeling like I'm wrong for being interested in a beautiful, intelligent and emotionally healthy woman named Sara, who made a part of me feel really alive. I'm crying right now because I'm so damn MAD about these feelings. I HAVE DONE NOTHING WRONG YOU IDIOT DEVIL!!!! If I am guilty of anything, it's of showing up to a radio station and meeting a beautiful woman who I have a difficult journey and business passion in common with. I am guilty of having coffee with her and having what I experienced to be a deep, meaningful and powerful connection with her. I am guilty for having true empathy and caring feelings for her....I am guilty about caring for her heart and how she can get it back in harmony with the Love of her Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I'm guilty of wondering why the Lord might have brought her into my life and wondering if it's possible she might end up being more than a once chance meeting, in my life. That's the only thing I'm guilty of, you ACCUSER.

Meanwhile, every single day the last 2 weeks has been difficult just holding my feelings and curiosity back in the face of the pressure from everyone to NOT SAY SOMETHING. I'm getting more and more upset about this each day. I know the books all say, "Watch out for rebound relationships", give yourself time to heal from the wounds of your first relationship and to take it slow...I'm NOT AN IDIOT and I'm not some "needy person" looking for an unhealthy "rebound" relationship!!! My first relationship has been dead for a LONG time...probably since 2006 and I've just been trying to keep it alive artificially for years. The truth is...I was legally and righteously able to divorce my wife, without sin, after she admitted to me about the emotional affair, 3.5 years ago. Rather I forgave her and asked her to tell me the whole truth, to which I don't believe I will ever hear. On top of that, I don't think she EVER really loved me because she never even had the capacity to love herself. I'm not out looking for my next wife or even a relationship...I've been TOTALLY focused on the Lord...I'm healthier than I've ever been in my entire life and because Sara just shows up in my life and the circumstances of our lives are similar, all of a sudden, I'm being warned to keep my distance. I'm sorry, but sometimes God doesn't work inside the confines of the latest greatest advice of "relationship" books or inside of what seems to make sense to everyone else. Sometimes, God does very special things for his children. God's ways are not OUR ways.

I'm at the point that I would almost rather take the chance to simply COMMUNICATE my thoughts to Sara and scare her off completely, than to sit around like this, miserable and losing sleep over this battle in my mind, between what I feel like I should do and what everyone else feels like I should do. God showed me those two birds in an incredible way, for a reason, didn't he? I asked him, in prayer ON MY KNEES, the night before to show me a sign that I could communicate to Sara and I'm not sure he could have done something more obvious than the birds in the lake, unless he had them spell out her phone #. SO WHY HAVEN'T I TAKEN ACTION? Why am I listening to others, instead of what I believe the Lord is telling me?

*My biggest fear in telling Sara is not that it's wrong...it's that she won't be on the same page or having the same thoughts and I'll have to deal with that disappointment...that's quite likely but I'm not trusting God for **my** outcome...I'm trusting God for HIS outcome. I'll accept the outcome, whatever it is, but I feel like I need to be obedient to my heart and have the courage to say something. There is a part of me that feels*

like "I owe it to Sara...to be honest with her too about this, not just me. For all I know, we may just be good friends for years to come...but this would be some whopper of a secret for me to keep between us!

Lord...please forgive my anxious heart, but why don't I have peace about not telling Sara, if it's really the "right thing" to do? Why will this feeling NOT go away? I really don't care if Sara is scared away anymore...I'm not going to pretend to be or feel something I'm not or to be "cooler" about this whole thing, than I am. Maybe I am supposed to just scare her off. I'm so upset about this...this SUCKS God....why am I so torn up about this? Why am I sitting here crying like this and feeling so afraid? Father...I'm not strong enough to wait...please help me...please show me something else...I'm so confused and lost about this whole thing...there is something powerful about all of this and I'm scared.

What if I tell Sara and she says, "Sorry Michael...I didn't feel that at all."...It would be very disappointing, but at least I would KNOW where the boundaries of the relationship are and I could move on without having to think about this so much. I love you so much...please help me Father...I didn't go looking for this situation; it came to me...please direct me...please guide me in this and may YOUR will be done in it. I love you so much...Michael!

A few days later, desperate to be over the anxieties of all of this, I decided to openly share that journal entry with Sara as a way of helping her to understand what my thoughts were and possibly scare her off and be done with all of this. She responded so sweetly and so respectfully, saying "Michael - Sweet Soul...I need to let you know that I'm seeing someone already, but that I'd really like to meet with you and talk about your pain and your feelings about this." The second I saw those words, I was sad, but the sadness was quickly overcome with the feelings of relief that the door was finally closed, and I could now relax. Oh, how badly did I need to better understand and cling to Psalm 37:7-8, where it says to "Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him, and do not fret because it leads only to evil." I also needed Philippians 4:6-7, to be reminded that I need not be anxious about anything. Instead, I burned up several days and nights by fretting about something that was never even a possibility. How foolish!

Sara and I met the next day at Panera. She was so comfortable and so sweet to me about the whole thing. The relationship felt instantly like a deeply caring and honest friendship. I apologized to her for the situation and any misunderstanding. I told her that I had been caught up in what I felt was a real connection, when I saw her. She stopped me and said, "Michael...we did have a deep connection...and I completely understand your feelings and why you've been feeling this way." She said, "An attractive woman is paying attention to you, taking an interest in your story, concerned about your feelings, has a similar story to yours and is giving you the attention that your wife hasn't given you in years...I totally get it". As soon as she said those words, I felt the greatest sense of relief in the world. This woman was mature beyond her years and she was very safe. I couldn't believe she was taking the time to have this conversation with me and that she was being so kind and helpful. I had a totally different respect for her and knew right then and there, I will always have a special place of respect for her in my heart.

I told Sara that I could now see how God used her to free my heart from bondage to the false hope of thinking that maybe one day Jennifer would change her heart and mind. My heart, which had been previously closed shut, was now open to the possibility of one day having and loving another wife, in accordance with the promise God had just given me in that lake. I thanked Sara so much for the kindness and respect she showed me, and the rest of the conversation we talked about business.

I have just reached the part of my story, where I am now claiming that God, in answer to the question, would I ever be married again, gave me a supernatural sign showing me that it was His will that I would one day be married again. If you keep reading, you will hear the astonishing story of how He alone gave me Persis to be my wife. However, for many Christians, they cannot possibly believe God would ever do

something like that, and in accordance with their interpretation of Scripture, I am now living in the sin of adultery and the only way for me to get right with God is to divorce Persis and get back with my ex-wife.

Please, if you are one of those believers, or if you are someone who has been accused of adultery through re-marriage, or if you are still confused on this topic, please read my free book on this subject, where I show all the passages and principles of Scripture that many people are missing on these topics. You may go to www.RelentlessHeart.com, and click the BOOKS tab at the top of the website, where you may download a free PDF called *“God Hates Divorce, BUT He Hates Some Marriages Even More.”* I wrote this book to restore some Biblical balance to the God hates divorce message, but for now let’s get back to the story.

My main problem at this time was that I had no concept of what it meant to wait on God for a promise, and I especially had no idea that it was going to be another five and a half years before that promise came true. Perhaps I was falling into the same trap as Sarai, Abraham’s wife, who decided to help God out on his promise for them to have a son. That’s why, what happened two week later, was clearly a test to see if I would compromise and grab a shortcut and counterfeit to the promise. Again, this reminds me of what Satan did to Jesus in Matthew 4, where he offered him shortcuts to all the things the Father had promised Him, food, followers, and to be ruler over all the nations.

Just two weeks after my talk with Sara, and *two days* before my best friend and I drove to Huntsville, AL to have Thanksgiving with my parents, I received a Facebook message from an old college girlfriend. We had dated for about 6 months, while I was attending George Wallace State Community College in Hanceville, AL, back in 1992. She had divorced a few years earlier after her husband had an affair, and she had two children and was teaching Sunday school at her church. Almost immediately, I was interested and began wondering if this could be the fulfillment of His promise. What are the chances of being contacted by an old girlfriend, who also had been divorced, and who also became a Christian, right after I was divorced and also right after I received the promise I would one day be married again?

Perhaps in justifying his own actions, Abraham might have said the same sort of thing like, *“What are the chances that right after God gives me this promise that I would have a son, knowing that Sarai is too old to have one, then we end up living in Egypt, where we find young Hagar to be our servant? Then, what are the chances that my wife would be ok with me sleeping with her to produce an heir....surely that is not a coincidence and must be of God!”*

My friends and family again cautioned me, but by now, I was even more convinced that I was free to move forward. While searching for insights about divorce, I came across an interesting book called *Redemptive Divorce*. The main point of the book is to preserve the unity of marriage by using divorce as a tough love tool to bring relief to the suffering spouse, while showing the other spouse they cannot continue to live like this and stay in the marriage.

The part that was so relevant to my desire to date someone was when the author made the argument that a marriage is over when a spouse has violated God’s covenant of marriage, through the likes of adultery, or abandonment of the marriage, not when a busy divorce court finally gets around to giving you a paper certificate of divorce. He furthered his argument by asking the question, *“When is a person considered dead to God, when they physically die, or only after you receive a proper death certificate from the court weeks later?”* That made so much sense to me, and I realized that our marriage, in God’s eyes, had been over long before Jennifer even filed for divorce. I had simply delayed the inevitable for years.

I was fully convinced, in my own mind (Romans 14:5), that I was divorced when my wife betrayed me and left me and filed for divorce. In fact, in God’s eyes, I was likely divorced years earlier when she had what

she admitted was an “emotional” affair with our former employer. I’m speaking technically only at this point, because I forgave her and chose to remain in the marriage, long after this had come to light.

Nonetheless, even the State of Florida now legally saw us as single, the second Jennifer signed and filed for divorce on July 30th, 2010, not after the attorneys finally finish battling it out and the court finally gets around to deciding how the assets should be divided and how time sharing should be conducted. When she legally filed for divorce, she broke God’s other command, “not to separate from her husband” and she violated the marriage covenant.

However, looking back on all of this, I now know it was **way** too early to even to start thinking about dating. I had been severely injured by the divorce and needed time to heal and most importantly to get right and solid in my walk with God, which was going to take years, not months. I think this is where so many people get into trouble, via “rebound” relationships. We have been hurt, thrown away, and we want desperately to be “wanted” or something just to make the pain go away. We want things to be back to normal, but we can’t fully understand the pain and the emotional damage of divorce, until you are far enough the other side of it. I was navigating life as a spiritually blind person, driven almost entirely by the needs of my flesh for pain relief. I was not yet proficient at hearing God’s voice, following His guidance, or waiting for His timing. Oh, what a secret that is my dear brother or sister in Christ. Learning to wait on God is perhaps one of the most important lessons He was going to teach me over the next several years, but it was too early for me to understand it yet.

1 Corinthians 10:23 – “Everything is permissible’—but not everything is beneficial.”

After the “birds in the lake” sign, the timing of my old college girlfriend’s contact seemed oddly coincidental to me. Even more so, the feeling of being desired, after I had been rejected so violently, was intoxicating and I immediately began a long-distance relationship with her, over the phone, but my main time and focus was still on the war I was in. By November, the attacks from my ex-wife and her attorney had become outrageous. Every time I turned around, there was some new accusation even more painful to endure.

The Glorious 666 Warnings

Isaiah 59:19 KJV *“When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him.”*

As early as February of 2009, when the marriage was already on its last legs, I started seeing the number 666 show up frequently. At first, I was seeing it a few times a month, then it showed up a few times a week, and after the divorce was filed, I started seeing it sometimes three or four times in a single day. I knew this was supernatural because nobody sees that number that much, in the United States, and so initially, I was very disturbed thinking that the devil was intensely harassing me. The following is a journal excerpt I wrote at the time about the frequency with which I was now seeing this number.

In the last week, I have seen the number 666 almost every single day. It’s beyond bizarre.

- 1. I weighed myself on my friend’s digital scale and the weight was 166.6 pounds.*
- 2. I balanced my checkbook and on 8/22 the balance was 1,666.28*
- 3. My bill for taking the kids to breakfast at Cracker Barrel on Sunday August 29th was \$46.66*
- 4. I called my Mom to tell her and she gasped and said that her checking account balance ended in 666, when she had just balanced it.*

5. *I filled out a lease application on August 30th, where I needed to indicate my monthly income. I took the \$160k, that I remember being on our tax return. I divided that by 2 since we are now divorcing. That's 80,000 divided by 12 to get the monthly amount, which comes out to be \$6,666.66*
6. *I ordered business cards and handouts for one of our projects. I called my friend to get his credit card #. The card # is **** 2089 6668 *****
7. *Sept 3rd. Dinner with Larry at Carabbas, I get a phone call from ***-656-6677*
8. *Sept 4th. Watching TV, the History channel is on. The program was called God vs. Satan, The Final Battle. There was the 666 again.*
9. *Sitting at attorney's office filling out financial affidavit info...one of my estimated costs was \$200 annually. We broke into monthly payments and it came out to be \$16.66*
10. *Researching a type of camera lens on YouTube. Found a video to watch and the # of times it had been watched was 666.*
11. *Purchased some software online and had trouble with the upgrade. The license from the upgrade contained the number 666.*

On Friday September 24th, 2010, while picking up the children for my weekend visitation, Jennifer came out to my car crying and told me how sorry she was about how she screamed and yelled at me the day she was moving her stuff out. She said, *"I hope you can forgive me"* and that God was convicting her of her sin and she was trying to get herself healthy for any future relationship she would have. I could tell that she wasn't "there" yet, meaning able to truly accept responsibility for her part of the mess or to truly repent of her behavior because she just had to keep throwing in, *"I was justified in my anger, but I didn't handle it well"*. It was the typical Jennifer who is never able to take any responsibility for her part of the wrongs.

Nevertheless, I could tell she was trying, and saying we should be peaceful with each other, as parents of the children, and that she hadn't been acting like a Christian towards me. I was shocked that she would even say something like this and there was a part of me that wanted to just grab her and hug her, but I knew better at this point. I could see that the three oldest children, Tyler, Chelsea and Nathan were also very perplexed about seeing their mom do this. That same evening, once the children were dropped off, she did the same thing, following me back to car, to finish expressing her regret and remorse over the way she had been treating me. I told her that she had already been forgiven and I appreciated her apology and looked forward to being able to peacefully parent the children together.

Incredibly, like a scene straight out of 1 Samuel 24 - 26, she was going to attack me even worse just three days later. In 1 Samuel 24, Saul showed such remorse for pursuing and trying to kill David, even saying how much more righteous David was than he, but then Saul takes 3,000 men and tries to find and kill David again just a short time later in 1 Samuel 26:2, as if the remorse he showed in chapter 24 had never happened.

Five days after she apologized to me in tears, on Wednesday September 29th, 2010, I was early for an appointment with my divorce attorney and I decided to check my email. I had just transferred my email server to Google from another service, so upon opening my email I saw that the number of unread emails was now 666. Thirty minutes later, I was sobbing uncontrollably in a private room at my attorney's office as I read a new motion, filed by Jennifer, which was filled with even more terribly painful accusations followed by a motion to have me psychologically evaluated by the court. This was all so terribly confusing and painful because I didn't yet understand that it was God himself who was hardening her heart against me like this. The same thing can be seen when the Pharaoh runs hot and cold with Moses, where one-

As the accusations continued to come in, I chose not to defend myself with answers to the children, but rather help them to come to their own answers. When they would say, “Dad, mom told us this or that”, I would say, “You know me, and you know how I live, and how I behave, do you think what she said sounds like something your dad would do?” They would reply, “No.”

She changed attorneys within just a few months of the divorce, and then started coming at me even harder. The accusations just kept piling up more and more, such that by the time the divorce case was built, my mother said, “*The only thing she hasn’t yet accused you of, is of being a homosexual.*”

She had gone to our church leaders, and the ladies at the Starbucks that I often worked from and said that I had an affair while she was pregnant with twins. She suggested to a very good friend and business colleague of mine in a downtown elevator, right in front of others, that I was capable of sexually assaulting my own twin daughters, and that she has been warned to keep them away from me.

She repeatedly accused me of being bipolar, psychologically unstable, emotionally abusive of her as a wife, and physically abusive towards my youngest son, to the point of him pooping his pants. I was accused of hiding money, and of even stealing the children’s savings bonds. She filed an emergency injunction to try stop me from taking the children to Alabama during one of my spring break visitations with them, saying that I was actually intent on kidnapping the children.

She was even now claiming in her pleadings that she called 911 on December 31st 2009, because she was afraid for her life, no longer because she was afraid for my safety going out on my motorcycle on a night known for drunk driving. At one point, my attorney pointed out in a court hearing that the majority of these slanderous accusations they were now coming up with against me, were not included in the original divorce petition, even though she claimed these things had been going on and that I was a danger to the family for years, but the truth didn’t matter in this court case. God was at work to crush and refine me first, then He was going to deliver me.

There ended being over 150 of these 666 warnings during the 18 months of the divorce. Not only was the number of times I was seeing it unheard of, but each one was such an accurate prophetic warning that even my own mother, who wasn’t a true born-again believer at the time, was dumbfounded when she and my step-father started seeing this with their own eyes.

In my story video, my mother stated on camera, “*At first when Michael told us about seeing the numbers, we just kind of rolled our eyes, but when 666 started showing up and Michael would come walking in the door and say, ‘Guys, something bad is coming—I’ve seen 666 twice this morning.’ And it wouldn’t be but a couple hours later and there would be a knock at the door, a new letter from her attorney or some terrible email or text from her, and we just started seeing this happen over and over again. It got to the point where we could no longer deny that God was speaking to our son in a way that we had never heard of before.*”

Psalm 109:31 For he stands at the right hand of the needy one, to save his life from those who condemn him.

My mother was the one who had pleaded with me back in August to hire a good divorce attorney, even agreeing to pay, since I didn’t have any money. Ironically, she wanted to hire the same attorney she used when she went through her second divorce. I was reluctant to do so because it was so much money, but I finally agreed. When the attorney first asked me what I wanted in this divorce, I told him that I would like to be put into a position to be able to have mercy on my ex-wife. I still had this false hope that if I could get the upper hand and then pour some hot coals on her head through kindness, she might break and change her mind. I was convinced for weeks that she was going to wake up in the middle of the night, in cold

sweats, saying, “*Oh my dear God, what have I done...please forgive me.*” I also was still under the delusion that my sincere sounding divorce attorney was really interested in helping me to end this all swiftly. Instead, the enemy came in like a flood, and Jennifer and her attorney became intent on destroying me through this divorce, just like the Pharaoh who began chasing the Israelites to destroy them after they left Egypt.

One day, while driving, I finally lost myself in total grief over the shock of what she was doing in this divorce. It just came upon me without warning. My heart filled with such pain and my eyes flooded with tears so badly that I had to pull off the road and just let it go. I start screaming as if speaking to Jennifer, saying, “*I hate you...I hate what you did to our family...why did you do this to our family???*” It was a death cry, so painful, so raw, but it was the real beginning of the grieving process of losing my wife and family. Unfortunately, she and the children weren’t going to be the only one I had to grieve the loss of.

The loss of my best friend

My best friend at the time, who was living with me, was so supportive of me through all of this. He had been like an uncle to my children, and he was shocked and angry about how Jennifer was treating me and the children in the divorce. That made me feel validated and not so alone in my pain, which just increased my love for him even more. I told him many times how much I appreciated his love and support.

Soon after the divorce was filed, I told him I would like for him to become my 50/50 partner in my startup video story telling business. I didn’t realize at the time that I made this un-wise decision purely out of emotion because I didn’t want to be alone while losing my wife and children in this terrible divorce. It was meeting a need of mine to be able to have him around me all the time. It met a need for him too because he was miserable in his job and was eager to try something else, so we agreed to give it a go. I trained him how to set up and use all the camera equipment and to do the administration parts of the business. I was still going to speak at local events about storytelling, sell the video jobs, conduct the interviews, and do all the story editing.

In the beginning it was wonderful, and we had a business product that people saw the real value in. More importantly, we were both hungry for God and wanted to grow in the Lord, and we enjoyed each other’s company very much. We read our Bible’s every morning and talked about God all the time. We were also both single and looking forward to the day of having someone that God would pick. We worked together and rode our dirt bikes together—it was truly a delightful friendship.

Up to this point, I think the only thing we ever disagreed on was my relationship with my old college girlfriend. He felt I should wait to date until I got my divorce certificate, but I disagreed based on what I have already shared earlier in this book. After being thrown away by divorce, my strong desire *to be desired*, prevented me from being patient in this area. Nevertheless, this wasn’t something that stood between he and I in any significant way, as we agreed to disagree.

On December 4th, 2010, we flew out to Los Angeles, CA to attend a story telling event at the University of Southern California’s Cinematic School of Arts. I wanted to learn more about story telling for our business and I knew it would be a great time for he and I to bond in our new business, over the trip. We had such a great time, driving all over the place and taking pictures of each other, with our new DSLR camera. I was filled with hope for a bright future, despite what was happening in the divorce.



For New Year's Eve, my old college girlfriend and I decided to drive half-way and finally meet each other again. When I saw her, I was shocked to discover she had lied to me about her weight, and that she was easily about 70-80lbs heavier than she had told me she was. I was very disappointed, but I wrestled with my own heart motives and the fact that it is our carnal nature that judges by the outside, whereas God looks on the inside. I justified her lying to me, first because I didn't want to lose the pain relief this relationship was also providing me, and secondly because I felt guilty as a Christian for being so disappointed by what she looked like, compared to the image I had of her from our college days.

I believe I was being manipulated to stay in the relationship by another evil motive too, *money*. I can't remember exactly when she divulged it to me, but after we were already committed to a serious relationship, she revealed to me that her father had died in a tragic accident and that she received several hundred thousand dollars in life insurance, which she had been investing and saving all these years. My financial situation was the worst it had been in years and when she told me about her money, suddenly it gave me this sick sense of financial security. I think I felt excited and almost proud, thinking, "*wow, my girlfriend has money*". There was some twisted part of me that felt comfort, like she was going to be able to take care of me now and save me from my financial troubles. How humiliating to think back and realize these were some of the real feelings I had.

Between feeling guilty about judging her outside appearance, and the temptation of financial security, I talked myself into turning a blind eye to her lying about her weight and we kept dating over the phone. I had already told her I loved her before she ever told me about the money, and indeed, I felt like I did, but clearly my motives were now tainted, and I was compromising my Christian values. I was drunk on the feel-good chemicals of my own mind and being led into foolishness, without even realizing it!

1 Corinthians 15:34 – Be sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning.

1 Peter 1:13 – Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit.

1 Peter 4:7 – The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.

Chapter 22

Trusting God for the Unreasonable

By January of 2011, seven months after Jennifer filed for divorce, our Revelations Training business had failed after she essentially hijacked the administration and billing of the company. Now, she too had lost the residual income she had been taking from the company and I was left having to appease our last few frustrated and confused clients.

Sometime around February, I developed a persistent pain in my foot, my stomach, and then my vision went blurry in my left eye, all at the same time. These symptoms remained for a few weeks and I became quite concerned, even to the point of going down for prayer at a local church I visited. I felt even more like Job, now that I was suffering in my physical body as well.

The following journal entry shows that all of this affliction was working well to bring about confession and repentance in my heart.

February 3rd 2011

Dear Lord,

I need to come clean to you Lord. I began weeping in sorrow again, as I read the Psalms this morning and found myself so identifying with King David. Father, as I lamented my situation and cried out to you, I felt this strong impression that you are again breaking me of my pride and that I need to settle this NOW. I have been so stressed out Lord. This is the worst I've felt in a long time. I'm being persecuted by my enemy, with no sign of relief, I'm starting a new business and trying to learn a new craft, I can't pay my own bills, I have tons of debt, and I'm completely overwhelmed by how much my life is NOT working, right now. I feel totally broken and totally poured out. I'm ready to talk Father.

Father, I'm disgusted that we are having to go through this again. I'm ashamed that I'm still struggling with this after the counseling and after this long 3-year journey I've been on with you. I felt humility before, I have walked in it before, but the current season of lack is bringing out the worst of silent "pride".

Lord, I still care WAY too much about what other people think Lord. I still know how to pretend that I don't care and for a while I felt pretty good about it, but now that I'm being humbled and persecuted to the farthest extent, I've ever been...my default reaction is PRIDE. Father I deserve to be punished.

I can feel the insecurity when I think about my finances and my inability to even take care of myself right now. I feel the insecurity every time I hear another rumor from my enemy, or I find myself having to explain the divorce to someone, for fear that they will think I've done something wrong. God, I confess to you right now that I've used my Blog many times for less than pure reasons. I've delicately tried to state things in such a way that they make me look good or to defend myself, make Jennifer look bad, all because I'm so insecure in my situation. All because I'm trusting in myself for protection against this persecution, NOT YOU!

I am a double minded man Lord. I am tossed to and from like a boat in the sea. I do not fully trust you always Lord. I repent. I say I trust you when things are going well, but when they aren't, I immediately begin trusting in myself.

Father, I must be one of the most chronically INSECURE people I've ever met in my entire life. It's like a disease and I hate it! I hate it, I hate it and I know you do too.

Lord, please forgive me. Forgive me for my Pride which wages war against my soul and against my becoming the man you want me to be. I'm exhausted from worrying about how I'm going to take care of myself, my kids, a future wife, and what everyone thinks about me. Lord, you have shown me once again...MY BEST simply isn't good enough.

God, why is this battle with pride lasting so long? I know I had an extremely insecure childhood, but I'm really disillusioned that I'm still struggling with this. I get myself convinced from time to time that I have it licked, and I say to myself "I'm better than this" and then BAMB...it comes right back. I keep wondering why I am not experiencing the success that others and even myself expect for me to experience. I truly KNOW that you are holding it back Lord, so that I'm not further corrupted. I know that I'm still not trustworthy if I'm this insecure and subject to PRIDE. I've certainly made progress, but Lord it is still very much there and still very much a thorn in my flesh. The thing I respect the most in others is humility and yet it's the very thing I seem to struggle with the most.

I HATE THIS LORD! I hate my insecurity and I hate my PRIDE that results. I hate it Lord. Please help me with this once and for all. I can't stand this anymore. I am no longer going to say or believe that I will never be able to get over this. I can accomplish ALL things through Christ who strengthens me. Lord please have mercy on me. Please help me! Please forgive me Father, shower me with your undeserving grace and have mercy on me.

On February 10th, 2011, I was speaking at a story telling seminar at a local college. During my introduction I mentioned my faith in Christ and my going through a divorce. At the end of my presentation, a Christian brother named Antonio Phillips approached me and stated emphatically that he and I needed to speak. I felt a bit of resistance to meeting with him, not knowing what his motive was, so I told him to just email my business partner who was keeping my schedule to arrange a time to meet. However, I truly had no desire to meet with him, so I kept delaying. About two weeks later, my conscience pinned me to the floor with, "you said you would meet with him, so meet with him".

I met with him over dinner where I discovered he had spent the last seven years in a hellish divorce custody battle. He told me his story and then challenged me not to fight the battle in divorce court, or for the children, saying that even if I won, I would still lose. He knew that she would make me pay hell each time I got the children for the rest of their life. He said, "As a father you want to fight because you believe that if you do not fight, the children will think you don't love them, isn't that right?" I said, "yes, that's right." He said, "I love my children dearly and my children know it, but I'm no longer willing to fight to keep what God has been pleased to take away." He explained that the Lord had really been teaching Him about letting go, and then he said something so striking, that I pulled out my phone and made him say it again on video. He said, "Michael, do you want to continue to death grip your dead past, or are you willing to open up your hands to the life and goodness God has planned for you in the future?"

Before that, I had never had any thoughts other than to keep fighting for my family and my life. The thought of opening my hands and letting go of what God was clearly trying to remove from my life, had never occurred to me, until God used Antonio to speak to me. That had always felt like quitting and failure to me. Most men want to fight to keep their life, when Christ demands that we be willing to lose our life. Please note, God was going to ask me to give up the fight for my family for Him, but that does not mean that every Christian will lose their family. However, it does mean that every Christian must be prepared to leave *all* if Christ commands them to do so, in accordance with His will for their life. There is no person or thing that is more important than following Jesus Christ, regardless of the outcome. Whoever you love the most, you will follow and sacrifice for. Jesus demands to be our first love, and He is *more* than worthy

as the Creator and Savior of all, to be so. Many times, following Jesus will result in others feeling like we hate them, because we are sacrificing them for Jesus. That is exactly what the Lord demands. Does the one who created *all*, not deserve just that? The people we may be called to “*sacrifice*” along the way, were also made by Him and belong to Him, not us! The Creator is always more important than the creation, and as Abraham discovered, there is no greater proof to God that we love Him more than all others, as when we are willing to “sacrifice” those we love.

Matthew 10:37 – “Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”

Matthew 10:39 “Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake, will find it.”

Luke 14:26 – “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple.

Then, Antonio read to me the story of David and Saul in 1 Samuel 24 and challenged me to let God fight this battle like David did, rather than me, and to give up the win/lose court battle. I respected this brother’s faith and I was so moved by his wisdom and passion, but by the time I got back to my car, I concluded this was just too radical and risky of an idea for *my* situation. Soon after I got home that evening, a Bible teacher named Kay Arthur was on TV talking about this exact principle in 1 Samuel 24. I knew this could not be a coincidence, but I still felt Antonio’s advice was too radical or extreme.

The very next morning, I sat down to do my normal Bible study, and as I flipped the page to the next day’s reading, there it was *again*, 1 Samuel chapter 24. I was totally amazed, and as I sat there on my couch, I began to pray and asked God if He really wanted me to do this. As I was praying, I heard loud and clear in my spirit, as if God wrote the words on my heart, “*If you will fire your attorney and trust me, I will defend you, and I will do it in a highly unusual way that will bring me much glory.*”

I quivered inside with excitement and fear because I knew I was hearing from God, but that He was asking me to do something very risky which made no sense whatsoever to my natural instincts and my current understanding of Christianity. I knew this would be a huge risk to my relationship with my children and to my already collapsing financial future, even including jail if my ex-wife won, and I could not afford to pay what they demanded in child support and alimony.

Against all my own human reasoning, and against every one of my friends and family, I told the Lord I would trust Him and fire my attorney. My mother and step-father both pleaded with me to see the danger and ignorance of doing so, even assuring me they would pay the attorney fees as long as needed, but I was now resolved to trust God’s words to me. Trusting God was going to make things much harder for a while, *not* easier.

By the end of February, my finances were in total collapse, as the humiliation by God continued in my life. I was getting further behind on rent, bills and child support each month. I still had about \$11,000 in joint credit card debt with my ex-wife that I was trying to carry each month as well. My divorce attorney still had some of our retainer left and suggested filing bankruptcy, which I was totally against. However, after thinking about it for some time, and realizing it would completely sever my ex-wife and I financially, I agreed to do so. This was another step towards my complete humiliation.

The Blessing of 777

My parents came down for a visit in March, to see the children and to check on me. One evening, while they were there, I dropped my iPhone 4 and not only did the glass break, but also the phone stopped working. I had no money at all, but found out that the Apple store could possibly fix it, so I called up and made an appointment while my parents watched the children.

On my way, I stopped to pump gas and noticed that the gallons pumped ended in .777. I was so surprised and said, *“What is this Lord? I know that when I see a 666 something bad is going to happen, does 777 mean that something good is going to happen?”* When I arrived at the Apple store, I mentioned to the tech that one of my former employees used to work at this store, and when I said his name, she said, *“Oh I loved Justin, he was such a great guy!”* After several attempts they were not able to fix the software and the lady said, *“I’m afraid you are going to need a new phone.”* I said, *“Oh, well, I can’t afford a new phone right now, so I’ll just have to wait.”* She said, *“Oh, don’t worry, I’m going to replace it for you for free.”* I was stunned and so humbled. I quickly walked out of the store in the mall, with my new phone, trying to hold back my tears because my heart was filled with such gratitude. I now knew that I needed to pay attention to the 777’s.

The devil’s attacks against me were relentless, and now the dream and prophetic warning in the Rainforest made all the more sense. Indeed, the large man in the dream trying to kill me was Satan, and it was clear that in real life he wanted to destroy me. The part in the dream where there were 14 friends turned out to be a prophecy that came true back in June of 2010, just weeks before my ex-wife left and filed for divorce.

I had been invited to come share my story at a home meeting of Christian counselors, as someone who was currently going through the fire, rather than someone who had already made it out. We all sat in a circle and I began telling my story over about a 90-minute period, ending at the part where my marriage was once again on the verge of collapse, after the attempt to tell our abortion story blew up in my face. I was feeling exhausted and totally defeated.

Once I finished the story, there were gasps, sentence prayers, and moments of silence, followed by them all praying for me. They put me in a chair and all gathered around to lay hands on me and pray. It truly was the most powerful prayer experience I can recall ever having. While they were praying, rest, peace and strength came into my heart, followed by some much needed courage. I was amazed by what God had done through their prayers. After they finished praying and returned to their chairs, an 80-year-old lady named Barbara said, *“Michael...abortion is murder, and an evil spirit of destruction entered your wife during that abortion, and it’s been there ever since trying to destroy both of your lives.”* This was the first time that I ever gave any consideration to the idea that Jennifer might have been under some real form of demonic torment or even possession, just like King Saul in 1 Samuel 16.

A few more of the counselors shared some thoughts and observations and I just kept thinking about how free and light I felt in my soul. That’s when suddenly I had a flashback to the dream I had in the rainforest, which prompted me to count the people sitting around the circle, who had just prayed for me. When I finished counting, I couldn’t control myself and I immediately burst out, *“This is the dream guys...this is the fulfillment of the prophecy God showed me in a dream 18 months ago in the rainforest!”* I began telling them the three-part dream God gave me and that there were 14 friends in the dream, who all leaped forward and wrestled the strong man on my behalf, subduing him and putting him in a box. I said, *“count yourselves guys...there are 14 of you sitting around me right now...14 friends who just attacked the devil on my behalf with powerful prayer! We all just praised the Lord!”*

I walked out of that house that night feeling like I was 10’ tall and bullet proof, compared to how I had been feeling. As fierce as the devil’s attacks had already been on me, I believe I would have likely been devoured

without their prayers, especially knowing what I was about to face in just a few weeks. That moment showed me how important prayer was in spiritual warfare.

John 17:15 – My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.

Ephesians 6:18 – And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

2 Thessalonians 3:3 – But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.

I was still seeing 666's each time another strike was about to come from my ex-wife or her attorney. By the end of February 2011, I was starting to get behind on my rent and couldn't afford to support myself and the child support amount, which had been arbitrarily set based on my past income potential, not on my current earning reality. I was now splitting all the business profits with my friend and partner, but I knew that child support had to be my top priority, even if it meant dissolving our partnership.

Another good friend of mine, who was a zealous entrepreneur with a successful Chiropractic business, had been studying internet marketing and testing it with several products. He contacted me about wanting to promote my sales training videos which I still had, by building an internet marketing system around them and sharing the profits. I was very anxious to supplement my income, so I could afford to pay the child support and get my head back above water, so we drew up the terms and he began building the site. I explained to my best friend that I was not going to include him in this business deal because this was something I produced long before our partnership, and because it had nothing to do with our story telling business. Even though this made perfect sense logically, I could tell he felt upset by this.

From my perspective, this was the first blow our relationship suffered. Then, there came a second blow when I discovered he was viewing pornography on my internet connection in the house. All I could think about was how quickly my ex-wife would want to use that against me, if it ever came to light, to take the children away from me permanently. I confronted him and told him sternly that he can never watch it again in our house, or I would have to ask him to move out, because I was not willing to jeopardize my legal rights to see my children.

Within a month or so of that confrontation, I was in a full-blown financial crisis. I was doing 85% of the work in our business for only 50% of the income. It wasn't his fault, it was just the way the work load was working out. He would set up the cameras and we would do the shoot in four hours. Then, two weeks later, I would still be sitting at the kitchen table, finishing up the edits on a story video. I started to have to borrow money from my parents for child support, and that's when I realized our business model could not support both of us as 50/50 partners. I sat him down to explain this, even apologizing for asking him to be my partner because I now knew it was done strictly out of emotion, and my not wanting to be alone, not because it was a God ordained partnership, or even a viable one. I could tell he was again hurt by this. This was the third strike against our friendship, two of which had been about money, and it was the one that delivered the death blow.

1 Timothy 6:10 – For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil.

I have never been so hurt and so disappointed to lose a friendship, as I was over this one. To this day, I am still shocked and sad that our relationship ended the way it did. I really enjoyed and loved him very much as one of the best friends I ever had. Even all these years later, there is no willingness on his part to have any connection with me, and yet he too claims to be a blessed follower of Christ. After several years, I finally paid him back the agreed upon monies from what he had initially invested in our business

partnership. I have tried to reach out to reconcile with him several times, apologizing for everything happening the way it did, even sending him all the Scriptures about not being willing to forgive, or be reconciled back to your brother.

He refused all my attempts, saying he remembers things very differently than me. He wrote me back saying that our relationship first went south, not because of money, or because I confronted him about his porno addiction, or because I ended our business partnership, but rather when I started having pre-marital sex with my girlfriend, while I was still going through the divorce process.

This reminds me of how dangerously easy it is for us to deceive ourselves, or to allow the devil to feed us lies that we eventually believe as truth. This is what God warns will happen for those who continue to live in sin, and for those that reject the truth. God can turn us over to a depraved mind (See Romans 1:28, 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12) Indeed, I did give into sexual sin with my girlfriend, a total of three times, over all those months. He was right about that, and in my letter, I agreed with him that it was sinful and foolish, but that I had long since repented of it and had grown into a God-fearing man who truly walks with Christ in obedience. I agreed that he was factually right, but I told him that I was shocked by the sheer hypocrisy of being rejected (spiritually murdered), as his brother, for *this* reason, by a brother who was himself addicted to pornography at the time, and had been for years. I asked him, *“Was my sin of having pre-marital sex with my girlfriend three times, worse than your years of having sex with hundreds, if not thousands of strange women (many of whom are married), on the internet?”*

Matthew 5:28 “But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

In his final letter, he claimed that he had forgiven me, but his actions clearly denied his words (Titus 1:16). Because of his own sin, His heart had been hardened against me. I am dead to him spiritually.

1 John 3:12 - Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous.

He claimed he was now free of pornography and that he was a happy Christian, but that is not possible according to the Bible. Let this be a warning to anyone who may be struggling to forgive their brother.

1 John 2:9 – Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him.

1 John 3:14 – We know we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.

Every time I come across an old picture of he and I, I am struck all over again with the shock and sadness that this happened to our friendship which was once so wonderful. I truly miss him and have prayed many times that the Lord would one day break him and free him from the darkness, that we may again be reconciled as true brothers in Christ. There were so many other wonderful things about him, that he is very hard *not* to love.

Job 1:21 – The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised.

May God's will be done, in Jesus name!

Kidnapped by my own parents

By May of 2011, things had really fallen apart. My best friend and I started the process of dissolving our partnership and he began looking for another place to live. I was getting further and further behind on bills and I had not been in a mental position to be able to focus on growing the story telling business enough to support me yet. I was still hopeful for some revenue from my online sales training partnership, but building the site was taking a lot of time, and there was one set back after another. Again, God was not going to allow me to save myself and escape these trials, but instead there was much humiliation still waiting in front of me.

On Thursday May 26th 2011, my parents called me and my mom said, *“Michael, you aren’t making it son. We are coming to get you, and we’re not taking no for an answer. We are driving down to Florida tomorrow and renting a moving truck to help you pack up and move you back home for a while until you can get back on your feet.”*

The crisis had been building for months and my parents has been thinking of how they could best help me, besides just sending money each month, and me still never getting ahead. I had not been open to the idea of moving back to Alabama, and away from my children, at all. That felt like ultimate failure and oh how painful and unthinkable it would be to leave the children.

I told my parents I needed to go pray about it first and see what the Lord said about this, not just what they said. As I began thinking about and praying about, memories of what happened just weeks earlier flashed into my mind. Jennifer confronted me during a divorce mediation about my not being able to pay the full child support amount each month. At one point, she exclaimed in front of all present, *“Michael, you have to make paying child support your top priority, even if that means moving back in with your parents in Alabama, so that you can do whatever it takes to put the children first.”*

Now, just weeks later, it was looking like I was going to have do exactly what my enemy was suggesting. I don’t remember receiving a specific answer to my prayer at that time, but I do know that I was given the peace to go and I started to realize that it truly was the best thing for all, at the time.

My parents started driving down on Friday the 27th to help me pack up and bring me back to Huntsville, AL. The children were coming to my house that night for my weekend visitation and I realized that I only had just a few hours to plan and prepare to tell my five beautiful children that daddy was having to move away. I began to tremble thinking about the reality of having to tell them, but first I had to tell Jennifer.

That evening, when I knocked on the door to pick up the children, I asked her to come outside for a minute in private. I swallowed hard, realizing the humiliation of conceding to my enemy, and I told her that I was having to do exactly what she suggested, and that I was in fact leaving in two days to move back to Alabama. She stepped towards me in shock, and with tears beginning to build in her eyes, she reached forward and gave me a hug. I was in disbelief that she would show any compassion at all, much less to have tears in her eyes.

I took the children with me and trembled in my heart for the next 18 hours, thinking about how and when I would tell them about this. The children were all still young, Tyler (9), Chelsea (7), Nathan (5), and the twins Ashley and Kaley has just turned (4). I knew Tyler would understand because I too was nine when my parent divorced, and I suspected Chelsea would understand, but I didn’t think the three youngest, Nathan, Ashley and Kaley could understand what this really meant.

I delayed the inevitable for a while, wondering if I would be able to do it without breaking into a sloppy mess right in front of them? The thoughts and fears that went through my mind were overwhelming. I

spent the first part of Saturday just soaking up every second I had with them, looking at them intently and having flashbacks of all our great memories, constantly on the verge of tears, feeling the disbelief of what had happened to our family and afraid of what was coming in just a few hours.

My parents had arrived from Alabama, but on late Saturday afternoon, I asked them to step out, so I could speak to the children in private first. God gave much grace and seemingly removed the knife from my hands, which he was asking me to drive through their hearts. There were no tears, no screaming and crying, no panic, just a calm acceptance of the unknown by all, as we all agreed to trust God no matter what! I assured them of mine and God's love for them over and over.

It wasn't until I was driving the moving truck down the interstate, knowing I was moving 600 miles away, that the pain and suffering of it all really hit me. I had lost my wife, my children, my friends, my home, my business, my state, my city, my neighborhood, all my finances, my ability to take care of myself, and all my dignity as a Christian man and father.

Those things were bad enough, but I could accept them. What I couldn't understand was how Father could want me to leave the children with a person who was capable of such evil and hate in her heart, all while calling herself a Christian and taking the children to church each week. I said, *"God how could you possibly be ok with the children being left in that situation and how are they supposed to learn about You from her?"* That is when I heard Him speak two words to my spirit... *"Trust Me."*

Mark 10:28-30 – Peter said to him, "We have left everything to follow you!" "I tell you the truth, Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—and with them persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life."

I drove the rest of the way to Alabama with sadness in my heart, but a strong resolve to abandon my will and to Trust God through it all. Once again, I was going to realize that trusting God was not going to just make things all suddenly go well or pain free. Within just days of getting settled in at my parent's house in Huntsville, AL, we received letters from her attorney to the court saying I had abandoned the children by moving to AL, the very thing she had insisted I do so that I could put the children and child support first.

Chapter 23

What Kind of Work Do You Want Me to Do God?

June 13th, 2011 – Journal Entry

I've been living in Alabama for 2 weeks now with my mom and step-father. The first week was great and we were thankful for being together as a family. By the second week, something in my mom changed and I noticed her taking little shots at my eating habits and my weight, even projecting on me that I was going to get fat and put on weight. I realized she was trying to justify herself because she was overweight, and was being convicted because I was in pretty good shape. A small argument ensued followed by a brief period of silence. I tried to put it behind me and just move forward, but there was a distance between us for about two days.

A few days later we sat down, and she admitted that her addiction is control and that she tries to control everything. She also admitted that she was doing exactly what I said she was doing—trying to justify being overweight by projecting onto me that I soon would be also. She also said that she was struggling with figuring out where the new parenting line with me was, because I'm a grown man now. She admitted that some of her parenting is coming from what she remembers of the old me, and she's not yet used to the new me who has changed so much.

Then she admitted to me that she has wondered from time to time, over the years, if I might have been bipolar, after seeing all the chaos in my life. She worried that her sin with Johnny, my biological father, might have passed his "curse" of bipolar on to me, and many times she has felt such terrible fear and guilt about this and that is what caused her to jump in and try to save me in this divorce. She said her motive was to try to redeem the mistake she had made.

I told her I was proud of her for admitting that to me and that I no longer hold her responsible for the results in my life, and that she has nothing to feel guilty about. I told her that I knew she did the best she could, with what she had, and that I trust the Lord for the results of my life from this point forward. At the hearing of those words, she erupted into tears and whaling, putting her face in her hands and literally screaming a cry of tremendous relief. I went to sit with her and held her for a few minutes while she got it all out.

In that same conversation, the subject of her not believing in the devil came up and so did the subject of her beginning to persecute me. My step-father stated that he felt the devil was using my mother to stand against the growth that was happening in me. I also told them that I felt God had me here to be an example of His light to her and the devil doesn't want that either. I let my mom hear a recording I had made about how I was perceiving our relationship so far.

In the recording I talked about how she was so backwards in her view of Scripture and of God, and that she almost seems to ask me questions to set me up, just like the Pharisees would do with Jesus... "*Teacher...what do you say about this...etc*". I mentioned that while we all had concluded that I was here for a reason that had to do with me teaching her something, I also knew that I was here to complete my training in humility, having to humble myself, as a 38 year old man, and live under my mom's roof and rules again, and even to endure the persecution of my faith in Christ.

After she listened to the recording, she admitted that it is her stubborn heart which was keeping her from receiving the full-truth of the Gospel and of God. She then said, with tear filled eyes, "*I am watching you to see God.*" She told God that she is "watching me" and that if He can change me and change my life from the person that I was, that she would believe He is real. She said that the changes she sees in me are so dramatic that she's been wondering if they were authentic, so she's been waiting to see if they are real.

1 Timothy 4:16 – "Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers."

On a different subject, last night Tyler told me that Jennifer is preventing him from being able to call me. This morning, while I was reading the word, I gave thought to how my kids are literally "*in the lion's den*" and surrounded by evil, from both Jennifer and her family. I was lamenting about this when immediately I hear in my spirit... "*Michael...you have trusted me with YOUR life, do you now trust me with your Children? Do you trust that I can protect them in the lion's den?*" I had a very strong impression that this is a test from the Lord to see if I will now trust him with the most important things left in my life, my children.

Daniel 6:23 – And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.

Regarding the above journal entry about my mother and I's talk, it might have sounded like this relationship would be all downhill from here and that the devil had lost his fight, but nothing could be further from the truth. The devil was not going to give up this battle, simply because my mother now had some awareness and confession of her shortcomings and stubbornness. No, as you will read later in the story, he was going to turn up the heat to the point that I would see my mother as no less of an enemy to me than Jennifer was.

Romantic life

Soon after arriving in Alabama, my girlfriend drove from her city to Huntsville to see me. We both were excited about this new open door for us to see each other, even though she lived about an hour away. I hoped we could put the awkwardness of her initial lie to me, behind us, as we spent time together, but as time went on, I could see more and more compromise in her Christianity that didn't fit with what I was now seeing as a true relationship with Christ.

We only saw each other about ten times, before I began to realize I was seriously compromising and looking the other way on some things that I knew I disagreed with. The first red flag had been her lying to me about her weight and then came other red-flags, things that showed me that she didn't know God like she claimed she did. I started seeing more and more rotten fruit, which I was so hopeful in prayer that God was going to cut out of her, through confession and repentance. When things in our relationship got very fragile, she eventually got honest with me about her own issues. At that point, I felt such compassion for her and agreed we should set aside any hopes of a romantic relationship and that I would instead be her very trustworthy friend to help her out. She was suffering from some serious unforgiveness of others and even herself. She agreed to it all, but after one more phone call, I never heard from her ever again.

Work life

June 28th, 2011

I've once again been wrestling with, "Ok Lord, where do I go from here as it relates to my work life". I've been trying to think of what I can do to bring in some money to keep the basics covered, including child support.

I had a conversation with my girlfriend a few weeks ago about this and she said that she felt I needed to be back out there speaking and that I wouldn't be happy just taking it easy. I agreed and began fantasizing a bit about getting my sales training career back up and going, to support myself.

The problem has been that EVERYTIME I think about heading in that direction I seem to get a giant set of red X's over it in my mind and I lose ALL peace in my spirit. My flesh seems to be saying "*go for it" this will be a good distraction from the pain and isolation you've been in for so long now. This is the path to good times...take care of yourself...do this!*" That's what I'm hearing in my flesh, but in my spirit, I'm hearing, "*This is the wrong path, sit still, listen...wait for me...trust.*"

This happened whenever I talked about it with my mom, or if I just looked at the newspaper to see what was going on in town, business wise...I would get the red x's in my spirit.

My spirit was willing, but my flesh was still being so needy and so weak. "*I need money...I need a career...I need pain relief*", etc.

After a previous lengthy talk with my girlfriend and my mom about it one day, I concluded that I was going to go for the sales training thing and get back out there, but that I needed to pray about first. Historically, I made quick decisions and just jumped right into taking action...no waiting upon the Lord, and no real prayer about it. So, this time I decided to really press in and see what the Lord said.

I prayed and asked him to give me clarity on what I should do. I want to serve him so much, but I also need to earn a living. After I prayed, I began studying the word. I ended up in the book of Revelation as a cross reference for a scripture in Matthew. I happened to turn to the introduction pages of Revelation and noticed a paragraph about the significance of “7’s” and since I had been seeing them for quite a while, I read it. It stated that the #7 appears 52 times in the book and that the #7 symbolizes “completion”.

In that very moment, I had the strong sense that the Lord was showing me that the work he has been doing in me, through this excruciating season, is almost complete and that I’m almost ready for my assignment. I felt so much excitement and joy in my spirit because of this and felt for sure that this was what the Lord has been trying to communicate to me.

I got up to go to the bathroom and walked past the clock in the kitchen and there was the other number that I see ALL THE TIME...2:22. I’ve seen the # 222 at least 20 or 30 times in the last few weeks and finally I was like “Ok Lord, I get the 666 and now the 777, but what in the world is with the 222’s?” Even my parents noticed that I had been seeing it everywhere.

So, on the same day that I prayed and asked the Lord to really show me what direction he wanted me to go with my career vs. serving him in full time ministry or whatever, I saw that # and decided to have it out with the Lord to get to the bottom of what it meant.

Since I saw it on the clock such that the # looked like 2:22, rather than 222, I wondered if it could be in reference to a Bible verse that the Lord wanted me to see. Since I was reading in Matthew, I looked up 2:22 and it was nothing significant, so then I thought well, what about Genesis. Genesis 2:22 said and God brought the woman to the man, that he made from his rib. I concluded that maybe that was to confirm that the Lord brought me girlfriend...but I immediately knew in my spirit that wasn’t what I was “supposed” to hear. So, then I went to Exodus and Leviticus and after a couple of books, I was like, *OK, Lord, I’m not seeing anything, am I supposed to go through all 66 books?*” Just then I got the impression to go back to the New Testament and naturally the next book in line was Mark.

AND THERE IT WAS! Mark 2:22 And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins.”

By the insight God gave me through the Spirit, I knew in that moment that what that Living Word of God meant to me was, that the Lord has done a new work and given me a new heart for Him. I have been transformed and completely changed from how I was a few years ago. He doesn’t want me taking the new spiritual work, He has just done, and then watch me turn around and pour it back into the old wine skins of being a sales/motivational speaker.

It would be like mixing oil and water. Mixing my love for Christ, my desire for Him alone, my hate for the world and its evil desires, my disdain for those that lust after more and more and more, and then mixing it with a “hyped” up career, where you entice people to reach for *more*, by having the right attitude and skills. How could I teach people about “making more money”, which is such a slippery slope to begin with, and then teach them about loving Christ first, and being content with less in their life?

YOU CAN'T DO IT...they do not mix, and thus the "new wine" would burst the old wine skins and BOTH would be ruined. WOW!!! WOW!!!! Praise you God!

Yesterday, I wanted more confirmation, because I was struggling with the idea that the Lord may be calling me to completely give up the secular marketplace for doing his work in a full-time ministry. I wanted to make sure I was really hearing from Him, so I felt a prompting to call Pastor Mike Schirle, my old Pastor from Discovery Church East.

I asked Mike, when and how he knew he was being called into ministry. He said that he noticed his desire was to serve and really encourage people in their faith and that he also seemed to be gifted in that area. I told him that I was feeling like maybe the Lord was calling me into working for him full time and my only heart's desire was for the Lord, but that I was still trying to figure out if that is my call, and if so, how I was going to pay my bills with work.

Mike concluded that, in fact, I do have a story that needs to be told and he said, "*Mike, you need to be doing lots of journaling of all this stuff that has happened, like with the #'s and stuff like that.*" He sensed it very much and told me that the Lord doesn't want me going back to the old ways, with the new work that he has done in me. Now I'll be using my talents, story and gifts for His Purposes, not mine. He implored me to "stay the course" and he asked the Lord to bless me with enough work of some kind to keep the bills paid, while I'm being prepared to do the Lord's work in a full-time ministry. I felt goose bumps and I was so encouraged that I almost cried. Mike had just confirmed what I believe the Lord is telling me to do.

The message is clear—stay put and don't go back to your old stuff, trust me and wait for your assignment...Work on getting that book finished. The book I have mentioned a few times in this story so far was a book I was writing called "The Success Mirage". It was meant to be my first good work for the Lord to expose the dirty side of ambition and the foolishness of chasing worldly success, but really it was just a stepping stone project for the gathering of thoughts and lessons I was learning, and which would be later be shared in various videos and documents I would write.

Also, I noticed that God used Mike and my mom both to confirm that I just needed to get through this divorce at all costs, even if it meant temporarily giving up some of my time-sharing rights with the kids, rather than keeping the fight going.

And speaking of the children, just last night, while talking to Tyler, I asked him to pray about me being able to have them up to Huntsville for my Summer time visitation with them. I told him that I sent a letter to the Judge asking for that. He said "*Dad...do you have a different judge depending on what day it is, like is it a boy judge one time and girl judge the next?*" I explained that it was always the same judge and I told him her name. He said "*Dad...is she mean or anything?*" I said "*No, son, she's just very matter of fact because judges hear all kinds of emotion and screaming and hollering all the time.*"

He said, "*Dad, you know what you could do?*" I said what son. He said, "*You could put a dollar inside the envelope with your letter to the judge and circle the part of the dollar that says, 'In God We Trust'.*" I was absolutely BLOWN away to hear this from my nine-year-old son. I was so proud and felt so much joy in that moment that I told him it was going to make his daddy cry. Praise the Lord God Almighty who told me to trust Him with my children!

July 1st, 2011

I was talking to mom about my story and about how I know God is calling me to serve Him and his people. I began passionately talking about my desire for God and my love for Him and how amazing He has been to reveal Himself to me. With tears in my eyes, after about 15 minutes of passionately sharing with her, I

told her that my biggest desire is to teach others how to have this loving and personal relationship with the Lord. She replied with tears in her own eyes, saying, *"I think you just did."* We sat for minutes without saying anything...only tears in our eyes. It was beautiful!

July 2nd, 2011

The kids are starting to take the separation harder. Tyler said three times in the most childlike way, *"Dad, you're kinda better than Mom."* I had just been talking to him about loving and trusting God, and he was telling me that so that I would ask him what he meant, but I already knew what he meant. He could tell that his dad sincerely loved and trusted God. But, I felt so bad and immediately felt compassion for Jennifer...she is really struggling and so are the kids now as she continues to control them.

A few days ago, Chelsea asked me *"Dad...why DID you move away?"* and I told her why, stating that the court ordered me to pay a large amount of child support in comparison to my actual earning amount and that until daddy got back on his feet financially, Grammy and Papa offered to let daddy live here, so I can pay the child support for them." Once I told her that, she said, *"Hold on dad"*. Jennifer took the phone, muted it, and then Chelsea came back on and said, *"Dad, I can't talk about that kind of stuff."* I told her that's not true and she can ask me anything she wants, and if it's adult stuff, I'll tell her. Tyler also told me, *"Dad, mom still won't let me call you, when I want, she says we can't call you without asking her and then when I ask, she says "no, not right now, which means NO."*

I was very discouraged to hear this and to see that Jennifer is still doing this garbage, even though she has such an upper hand on me now that I've had to move away.

July 10th, 2011

I woke up feeling so heavy and discouraged about church. I'm very concerned about "DOING" church and allowing anything to get in the way of the relationship that the Lord and I are having. I've also been concerned that I feel like I'm having to settle for a church, rather than find one I'm excited about belonging to. I feel like I'm going to have to look the other way on things that I don't want to, and that's bad. I told my step-dad that I feel like going to church is going to take me backwards with God, not forwards.

I went to the Rock Church this morning, for my second visit. Pastor Dave Melendez spoke, while Rusty was out of town. I loved the worship and I enjoyed and learned from the message. I walked out feeling relieved, thinking, *"ok, this church will work"*. I then decided to go to the newcomer's class the same day to learn about the church. It was done via video with Pastors Rusty and Leisa Nelson. There was just something that didn't set right with me. I couldn't put my finger on it, but when they started talking about sewing your seed, I was like, *"Oh, no God, not this church too!"* By the time the video was over they had put a tremendous emphasis on membership, not spreading gossip, and then said tithing was required of membership and I was like, *"Ok, something's not right."*

I left church, very frustrated. I asked God, *"Ok, am I not supposed to be in this town?"* I begged him to tell me what was wrong and why I was having these feelings...was it me, or were they legitimate feelings? I got so frustrated that I even got a little too hot talking about it when my parents asked me how it went.

I went to lay down by myself and I couldn't stop thinking about it. I picked up and googled the name Bishop Paul Zink, who is the mentoring overseeing pastor of their whole church and to my surprise, there it was—he is Brig Hart's pastor. Suddenly, it all made sense and I could see that this church is being mentored by a prosperity teaching church. God was faithful to quickly show me what the problem was. Now, I just have to find another church. Thank you, God!

July 11th, 2011

Father, I love you so much and thank you so much for the relationship that you and I have. Lord, I need your direction on finding a church and finding some work. I know that you have me in your school, and that you have asked me to be still for a long time, now, but I am sensing that the time is near for me to find some work. I trust you Lord, please guide me Holy Spirit and help me get this right. I know that you have my best interests at hand, and I don't want to do anything that will interfere with the work you are doing in my life.

All I really want to do is begin to tell people about you and how they can have a tremendous relationship with you, and I'd like to do that with writing and speaking and video, but Lord, I'm not sure how I can do that and earn money to pay my bills. Please give me some solid guidance on this Lord.

My mind is flooded with the video message idea Lord. I really want to make those video messages. Can you please confirm for me, if this is the direction Lord? Thank you so much...I love you!

July 12th 2011 – I made my first attempt at filming a very short version of my story video.

July 14, 2011

Today, I woke up feeling like absolute garbage. My sinuses are not well...I have blurred vision and pressure. I feel quiet and not wanting to do anything...typical bad sinus day. I tried to read the word and really couldn't concentrate at all. As I laid down, I prayed and asked the Lord to help me with my sinuses.

I decided to finish listening to the last of "Pursuing God" by A.W. Tozer. I was on the last chapter. Incredibly, it was on the subject of the spiritual vs. the secular. He goes into detail about how many Christians get caught in the dreadful gap between wanting to rid themselves of the world and it's nonsense, so that they can have more time for God and needing to LIVE in the world, ie..work, eat, chores, systems, etc. This has my attention, because I have straddled that fence for years and I even just talked about it in my story video interview.

I sense that the Lord may be wanting to get my attention on this matter. I have a tendency to go to extremes on whatever I do. I have felt myself thinking that the Lord is pulling me out of the marketplace completely and having me do his work full time and yet I have heard myself then say... **"Well, Lord, everyone can't just quit their jobs and run completely from the world."** In other words, I've always known that I could quickly go to an extreme on something the Lord was trying to teach me.

I believe the Lord has allowed me to lose everything because I told him I loved Him and wanted him to have his way with me. I believe He knew my motives for work (to make lots of money that I might trust in it and gain honor for myself) had always been wrong and that's exactly what Tozer talks about. He says the work we do is not wrong or evil, it's the motive behind what we do that makes it evil.

He explained that not every activity is as valuable as the next, but that they can all be made Holy or set apart for the Lord. He uses the example of Paul making tents, vs him preaching the Gospel. Making tents is certainly not as valuable of an activity as bringing people into the kingdom of God, but it can be made Holy, as Paul instructs us, *"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."*

The overall sense I'm getting is that the Lord doesn't want me to think of work as wrong or something that I should run from, but rather work is necessary and a means to an end. And if my motives are pure, it can be made Holy and useful to bring God glory. Again, the problem of work being when people's motives are wrong, and they use work for the wrong reasons, to get rich, to gain glory, to gain power, to run from their family, to trust in it, etc.

I think it's possible that I'm struggling with this so much because my primary work for so long, was in this area of sales training and motivation. I don't believe that either of those are bad, in and of themselves, but I believe that they are a very slippery slope. Sales training teaches people to be hungry for money and to seek money with all their efforts. We know from Scripture that this is a grievous evil and it causes all kinds of problems (1 Timothy 6:9-10). Motivational and self-improvement teaching are more like a religion that teaches, you are your own master, you choose and determine your results and the goal is ALWAYS more. How much more is enough—just a little bit more. But look what God's word says.

Hebrews 13:5 – *Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."*

That type of training takes people closer and closer to SELF reliance rather than God dependence. So, is there any kind of sales job that is acceptable to God? I mean Paul had to SELL his tents. It's a very slippery slope but I suspect that there are those that keep their hearts pure and hands clean. I suppose a teller at a bank has just as much temptation to take a little something for themselves, as the sales person does to fudge on their presentation or manipulate the customer to make the sale. Again, I think that sales in and of itself appears NOT to be the problem, but rather the motivation and purity of the heart.

This idea certainly shows a need for people to be taught this in sales. To me this matter is very clear now and especially after the Lord showed me Mark 2:22, which incidentally I just saw last night and was like "*What's that for Lord...I already know that!*" Hmmmm...did the Lord know I would be thinking about this very subject the next day?

So, I became excited about the idea that work can be made Holy, regardless of what it is, assuming it doesn't violate God's principles. Work was originally part of the curse that man received from God as a result of the fall. Woman received increased pain in child bearing and that hasn't stopped, just because Jesus showed up, so why would work and toiling the soil, for man? It wouldn't.

Work creates dignity, provision for self and family, and resources to be shared with others if God so blesses the work of a man's hands. Assuming a man doesn't choose a field of work that violates his conscience, he can create glory for God, by working as unto the Lord and not man. An example of how my work could be made holy, would be as I say sentence prayers of thanksgiving and requests to God, throughout my day and projects, and regularly tell people about His truth.

So, I sense that the Lord has opened my eyes to this today and that he is preventing me from running towards ministry as the ONLY option for my time and life. The Lord apparently still wants me to work. The bible says that if a man doesn't work, he shouldn't eat. A man that doesn't provide for his family, is worse than a non-believer (2 Thessalonians 3:10, 1 Timothy 5:8).

So, now the question I have is what should my work be? What kind of work would help me provide, and yet leave me enough time to do MINISTRY, just like Paul did, when not making tents? It makes sense to use the talents that the Lord gave me and since we live in a country where there are many options, the doors of choice are open. Should I possibly create a Christian sales training program, that removes all the slimy tactics and focuses on helping people like you and trust you, putting service before money, having integrity, not chasing money, but rather doing your best and trusting God with the results?

This would be a very narrow niche, but it would be a great opportunity to encourage and train the body of Christ in those areas. It would be like ministry and work. Or, should I maybe stick with the story telling business and write an e-book and do seminars on that subject? The thing about Story is that it could even be taught to sales people as a way of "selling" their product without manipulative tactics.

Or, should I stay right where I'm at, work on small projects and video jobs like Dr. Greg, so that I can get my books done and have speaking and writing become my career, like Donald Miller. Or should I contact Larry Crab to see what opportunities might be available to work alongside of him?

Lord, I suspect that the kind of "plow" I put my hand to, might not be super important to you, but since my gift is so close to my desire to minister, I pray that you speak clearly to me about this Lord. I am listening with all my heart. Please direct your servant's steps, like you are so faithful to do. I love you Lord...thank you so much!

Sunday July 17th, 2011

After just praying about the work thing on Thursday, Dr. Greg called and firmed up that he wants me to do his video work, starting on Wednesday and he has \$2k waiting for me to go. He also agreed to pay me \$6k to produce his short story video. I was so excited and relieved...praise the Lord.

I told him about finally starting the work on my story video and he said, "*Michael...be careful...you know that Satan is going to attack you because of your testimony and doing this...*" I said YES!

Monday July 18th, 2011

I saw 666 today while editing. The scale of a video was 66.6% and my eyes went right to it. I hesitated to believe it was actual a "sighting" until I remembered the last time I ignored it and then what happened.

Sure enough, five minutes later, I check my email and there is Jennifer's reply to my request to visit with the children when I go to FL on the 27th for court. It was carefully worded to the "T", very matter of fact, denying that she has ever denied me the right to "local" visitation and stating that it's all my fault because I moved. She concedes to allow me to see the kids, only if they are at my dad's house in Florida and of course she wants me to fully disclose all of my plans and the type of vehicle that I will be taking the kids in. My mom read it over my shoulder and walked away cussing because she was so mad that Jennifer does this to the children.

Then the kids call me and Chelsea volunteers to me that grandpa, Jennifer's dad, said, "*I'm going to be judged and sent to hell because I have a girlfriend while being married.*" She said he also said, they are going to be guilty before God if they say they want to live with daddy. Chelsea explained that they always say, "*We want daddy...we want daddy*", and that's when he said it. I was very upset when I heard this, but it didn't make me feel like it would have months ago. I called to speak to their grandfather to confront him on this horrible and abusive behavior. His wife answered the phone and the conversation was useless. She was in denial about everything stating that, "*Chelsea, must be making this up or spinning things she is hearing.*" She was doing her typical spinning of everything and bragging about HOW MUCH *they* do for the grandkids and how much help *they* have been and how *they* have provided for the kids, implying that I haven't. She said things that were just sick, and I realized this was pointless, but at least I confronted her. She did say that she promised they wouldn't say anything positive or negative about me either way, which I knew was bologna!

By the time I got off the phone, I was upset, but I thought I handled it well. I began sharing the poison with my mom and Bob, who had been sitting in the other room. My mom made a comment about still liking a part of the grandmother and I said, "What?????" There's something wrong with you then if you like this person...she is sick. Mom got mad and said I disrespected her and asked me to leave the room. I left and went to Starbucks...praying on the way and realizing how unbelievably sneaky the devil is. I thought I would be ok if I kept my cool on the phone with my ex mother-in-law, but then when I let my guard down,

he came in and took a punch right between my mom and I. I called my mom when I got here and apologized and told her I was very sorry. We both realized I took my anger on my mother in law out on her.

I'm actually quite impressed with how darn sneaky the devil is. This is twice he has taken a sneaky shot at me and hit me where I wasn't looking. He is definitely a formidable foe and I must learn to stay alert.

Sunday July 31st, 2011

Wow, this past week has been unbelievable!

Tuesday morning July 26th - About an hour into the trip to FL, to attend court and see the kids and hopefully bring them back to AL, after my motion for summer time visitation is heard, I look down at the odometer and see 48,666 miles. I immediately give thanks to the Lord and begin to praise him for warning me.

About an hour later, I'm 137 miles into my trip and I get a phone call from the court telling me that the Pre-trial hearing in our divorce case, has been cancelled, because Jennifer's attorney objected to my Motion for summer time visitation, being heard by the General Magistrate, since our judge has retired and has yet to be replaced.

I send Jennifer an email, stating that although court has been cancelled and she has denied me out of state visitation, that I would still like to come and see the kids from Wed at 4pm to Sun at 4pm, at my Dad's house. She replies back that that will work for her, but that she needs my itinerary, agenda, vehicle information, addresses, phone #'s etc.

I begin thinking about just picking them up and taking them to AL, justifying to myself that I have a legal right to them, that the court has already denied her desire to keep me from taking the kids out of state, back in July of 2010 and that the kids are being deprived of visitation with me, where I live and that NO ONE in their right mind would doubt that I was doing the right thing.

I decided to seriously pray about it, while driving down the road, and asked the Holy Spirit to give me direction and His heart on the matter. Almost immediately, I get this internal insight. *"If you take the children to AL, even though you are legal justified, you will not enjoy your time with them, because you will be in violation of your own conscience. Also, you will further insight her anger against you and the children and you will both suffer even more consequences if you do this."*

My flesh was saying, *"Yes, this is right...go for it."* My spirit was saying, *"Don't do it."*, so I walked in the Spirit.

I am starting to see more and more why God has been showing me Matthew 5:39 so often. I am indeed having to obey this command repeatedly with Jennifer.

Matthew 5:39 – "But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also."

When I got to Florida, Jennifer spent the better part of two days, trying to deny my local visitation because I wouldn't provide her with all the frivolous details she was asking for. Eventually, I contacted the court to see what would happen if when I pick up the kids, I take them to AL for a visit, so they can see their grandparents. The lady stated that Jennifer could file a complaint and instead, what I should do, is file my intentions with the court and my dates of travel to out of state, so that if she does file a complaint, the court will see that I have them and am planning on bringing them back.

Instead of doing this secretly, I decided to not give the devil any room to twist the truth or for Jennifer to call me and liar and kidnapper, so I sent an email to her and her attorney of my proposed agenda and what I heard from the court.

This backfired and they both insisted that there was an Admin order restraining the kids from being removed out of Orange county. In fact, there wasn't. It just stated that I couldn't relocate them or change their school districts outside of 10 miles. Nonetheless, they covered their bases and then said that because I didn't provide the agreed upon information that she would not be willing to allow me to see the kids.

By Friday, I had seen an attorney who told me I was "stuck" and had no real choice because of us not having a judge to hear anything and that anything I sent in as a motion, her attorney simply needed to object to and there was nothing I could really do about it.

I was incredibly disappointed and frustrated, and I felt completely helpless! I began to seek the Lord's face for this and went to the Barnes and Noble on Colonial Drive. I picked up John Piper's "Desiring God" and flipped to the chapter on suffering. God used that chapter to show me that I was in fact suffering for Christ in this moment and that this was to make the suffering of Christ more real to those around me, through my own suffering. Not to mention that I could feel this was about more character development...further humbling, further breaking of my pride, more dying to myself, more becoming like Christ, etc.

Philippians 1:29 – For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

I pushed back from the table in relief and told the Lord, I am willing to suffer for Christ. I thanked Him that He cared enough about me to allow this suffering in my life and I thanked Him for the fruit that I knew would come from the suffering. Peace and acceptance came to me in great amounts for the rest of the visit. I even humbled myself to my enemy on Friday morning and told her I would supply her with whatever she wanted from me to be able to see the kids on the weekend. Her attorney drew it up in an agreement and I gladly signed it, just so I could see the kids.

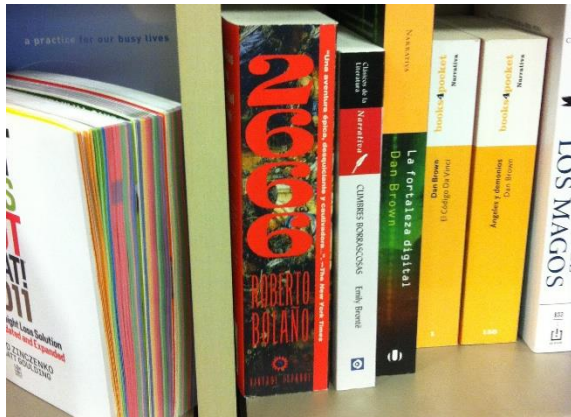
I hadn't been able to see them in two months and here I was only being given 48 hours...I was disappointed but mostly thankful for what I had.

In those days, I essentially lost my children. I couldn't do anything to get them, to see them, or tell them I love them or even correct the constant lies their mother and her parents had been telling them about their dad. I felt completely broken and helpless, but the Spirit kept asking me, "Do you trust me?" I concluded in my spirit that the Lord is highly invested in this whole divorce situation and that He is working behind the scenes for an extraordinary outcome that won't seem normal, when it happens. I just began to trust him like never before—it was supernatural!

My conclusion was that the Spirit was telling me that I'm suffering for Christ and that I need to trust Him for the work and for the kids, and for what he is doing that I cannot see. I then had total and complete peace...it was just incredible. So much so, that my mother, a friend, and even Norma were freaked out by my peace. Norma kept saying, "I'm a fighter and I hate injustice, and this is injustice." I kept telling her that the Lord has confirmed for me that HE is doing the battle, not me!

Isaiah 26:3 - You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.

John 14:27 – Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.



I got the children on Friday night. Jennifer's dad was driving the van and she wanted to exchange the kids in the Target parking lot, no longer at her house. This is of course to make me look like I'm some dangerous or unfit person. The kids freaked out and were jumping everywhere in the car, when they saw me. I was so thankful to see them.

While staying at my dad's house for the two days, we took the kids for ice cream on Saturday night and I see 666 in a phone # on the Beef O Brady's billboard out front. Then, on Sunday night, dropping off the children,

Jennifer's looks could have killed me. She was the worst I've ever seen during a pick up or drop off. Her mom was there driving and Jennifer refused to let me drop them off at the house like normal, reminding me I signed an agreement that states that Target is the exchange place. The kids were all now in her van when Ashley started crying and screaming, "daddy!...daddy!" and Tyler came over to tell me that she needed to say goodbye to me again. I went over to their car and Jennifer was strapping her in the back on the van. I reached in to hold Ashley's hand and tell her I love her, and that I'll see her soon and then, with the poison of hell in her voice said, "she'll be fine thank you." and pushed my hand away. I calmly said, "Jennifer, you don't have to be like that", and walked to my car. The children all looked so sad and quiet.

My suffering for the day wasn't yet over. I walked into my good friend and his wife's house where I was planning on staying Sunday night, and I was only there for about 3 minutes before having to leave. I was explaining something to his wife and mentioned my failing relationship with my girlfriend and she smirked



back, "you have had a girlfriend Michael...you are still married." I began to explain, and she said in a very critical spirit, "don't you even want to give yourself time to heal"...again I began to explain, to which she says, "well, you two can talk now, I'm done talking", and she turned around and went to their room. I stood there for a few seconds realizing what just happened and I spoke towards her bedroom, "I feel like you just judged me and then turned around and left.". She replied..."Well...", to which I said, I'll just leave." I got my bags out of the room and left. This was an unbelievable evening.

Satan the accuser was on a role and now I had nowhere to spend the night. I went to Barnes and Noble, while making a few calls to find a place. I was on the phone with a friend telling her what happened when I looked up and saw this book titled in HUGE red letters "2666". This was the third 666 that week and indeed it had been a week of torments from hell.

To make matters even more difficult, the next day, I received an email from Jennifer requesting money for the children's new private school stuff that I was never told about, or even agreed to. When I got back home to Alabama on Tuesday night, there were six more legal letters from her attorney, all very accusatory and full of lies again, many of which required that I respond in 10 days. I knew they had sent so many like this on purpose, because they knew I was out of town in Florida and probably wouldn't be able to reply to them on time, which could put me in contempt of court.

Job 16:11 – God has turned me over to evil men and thrown me into the clutches of the wicked.

Job 17:11 – My days have passed, my plans are shattered, and so are the desires of my heart.

Job 19:7 – “Though I cry, ‘I’ve been wronged!’ I get no response; though I call for help, there is no justice.”

Chapter 24

God’s Preparation for Ministry

“But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia...then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem...” – Galatians 1:15-18

Throughout this post-divorce season, I was largely isolated from others and shut-up with the Lord over three and half years because there was much for me to learn, and to *unlearn*. I was reading my Bible and other good spiritual books on average of about four hours each morning. My thirst for God and His truth was unquenchable. Seven days a week, I could be found sitting in the same chair each morning, from about 5am to 9am, absorbing the word and filling note pads and index cards with all the things I was learning. In the evening time, I would often retire back to my bedroom and read some good spiritual book. I did not watch any TV and movies were very rare. Most of the time when I was invited to some sort of entertainment, I declined so I could stay home and study and read and pray. God and His word were my only interest, and I probably looked like a hermit to some people, but really I was in school and had become a serious student of the Bible.

Also, during this time, I went for long prayer walks on the nearby mountain trails, on average of three to four days a week, spending anywhere between forty-five and ninety minutes in prayer. My desire for prayer also became insatiable and praying for long periods of time became effortless and routine. This kind of prayer can only be empowered by the Spirit of God because to the natural self, this is a difficult labor. Sometimes I would walk praying the entire four-mile trail and find myself disappointed because I was almost at the end of the trail and I didn’t feel like stopping my prayer time yet. There were times that my praying still felt unproductive and like a difficult labor dependent only upon me, but they were rare. By this, I learned what it meant to have a spirit of prayer, where God Himself empowers you by His Spirit to pray in accordance with the Spirit. These were the two activities that most contributed to my getting to know God, and this intensity lasted for over three years’ time, while I stayed living with my parents.

Many of the stories you will hear in the remainder of this book may sound ridiculous, extra-Biblical, or absolutely foolish to you, like how God started using numbers as Scripture references over and over to guide me. Or, they may sound flat out impossible like many of my recorded and answered prayers. You may find yourself thinking, *“I’ve never heard of that before, or God has never done that for me.”* Let me remind you that I said that too at one time, but Christ said a tree is recognized by its fruit, and that wisdom is proved right by her actions, or results. What happens throughout this story may seem bizarre or even delusional, UNTIL you see how it all turned out. If you will stick around to hear the end of the story, you will see that God Almighty indeed did it all, to His great glory! Our God is nothing short of astonishing and this journey has been nothing short of remarkable!

August 3rd, 2011

I was outside studying the book called *Radical* by David Platt and really meditating on the Lord. I have been asking the Holy Spirit to really reveal to me how I have gotten to this wonderful place with

Him. People seem to be blown away by what is going on in my walk with the Lord, and so am I. I want to help others to experience this, so I've been pleading with the Lord to help me get the explanation correct.

I went inside the kitchen to get some coffee and I saw that my mother is already pushing her agenda and worries on me. She has laid out my IRS statement on the counter, and so I turn around and tried to get back to my morning time with the Lord, quickly. She heard me from down the hall and said, "*Michael...can I ask you something?*"

She then begins over-explaining her concerns and her agenda and what I need to do about my IRS paper work and balance. I'm delicately trying to agree with her and just get back to my quiet time and she follows me, talking, all the way to the back porch. I assure her I'll get it taken care of and she goes inside.

Now I'm frustrated by the distraction, and when I sit back down to read, I can only think of how much that interaction just irritated me. I can no longer concentrate on what the Lord was trying to teach me. I get up and walk to the fence in the back yard and begin praying. I confess my irritation and tell the Lord I can see how crafty Satan is and how wonderful of a job he did to distract me from my quiet time. I began to praise the Lord and battle it with truth and told the Lord I would not allow him to distract me from what he wanted to tell me this morning.

I went and sat back down and began to press in again. My mind was clear and un-distracted...I Praised Him. That is when the Lord opened my eyes to the incredible and wonderful truth that He is self-centered and first of all about Himself, desiring glory for Himself at all times, a topic many don't understand, and many are plain offended by, but now I see so many wonderful Scriptures that show this truth. I love it that my Father is all about Himself and bringing Himself glory—He absolute deserves it and I want to be a part of it...my Father is my hero!

August 10th, 2011

Shortly after leaving my friend and his wife's house abruptly, down in Florida, I was convicted by the Holy Spirit, that it was irresponsible to have shared about my having had a girlfriend. I blurted it out, without thinking about it and I was so tired from the past week. A few days later, I read in Corinthians about causing the weaker brother to stumble. Today, I read Romans 14 and was heavily convicted that I was wrong about telling about having a girlfriend, to the children, to friends, etc.

Even though I know God brought her into my life for a reason, I allowed what was good to be spoken of as evil, Rom 14:16, because I irresponsibly shared it. When I told the children and a few others, I was only thinking of myself and my rights, my freedoms, etc. My attitude should have been to keep it between me and the Lord, so as not to cause anyone grief or to stumble, just as it says in Romans 14:22. I feel the Spirit telling me, "*You're Learning*".

I saw 222 on paper this morning sitting next to the sidewalk, where I was running. I then saw 666 this morning, while working on the Suntrust business transactions that Jennifer spent, and also I saw 777 on the same report. I spoke to kids tonight and Chelsea and I were talking about her bible that she will be using for school, when she said, "*Dad...Mom says you don't read the Bible.*"

I hung up and was going to send Jennifer a text, and then reality hit me that I will only incur more abuse by correcting the wicked (Proverbs 9:7). I deleted the text and walked away chuckling because it's becoming comical, that these types of attacks just keep happening. Praise the Lord that I can smile about it!

August 13th, 2011

From time to time, I see Christian books and I find this huge question inside of me, *“Do I have a big call or not?”* I have such a strong desire to tell lots of people about the Lord and God has given me a strong speaking voice and boldness. I’ve been asking the Lord to please help me understand if I am to serve him one day in a large capacity, in front of large numbers of people, or is that desire just coming from my flesh and that I’m to simply serve Him in obscurity. Did He give me this desire and my personality traits so that I would one day desire and fulfill His work in a high visibility fashion, or is possible that desire is still a hidden unhealthy motive in my flesh where I feel I won’t be validated until I have a big message out there like others? I’m inclined to believe this is a burning desire coming from the Lord, but I’m asking Him to confirm it. Honestly, there is a fire so hot inside of me, that it feels like I cannot do this for only 10 people without it being a colossal waste of heaven’s time and resources.

August 14th, 2011

I had an interesting talk with mom and Bob last night. We’ve been talking about God almost every day, because I’m completely obsessed with HIM!!!! My mom is worried that I have some psychological disorder. To me, that is a real compliment, but I told her that I understand because what I’m experiencing is incredible. I’m not sure I know more than two people that are walking with God like this right now. I’m growing so fast and learning so much that I can’t even keep up in a journal—it’s too much.

Right after she expressed her concern, saying she was on the fence and didn’t know what to believe about me, my phone rings and it’s my good friend and former life coach Larry. I put him on speaker and he assured my Mom that he has seen this coming for years, and that God is up to something with me. At one point, she said, *“Well, maybe it’s like what Jesus said, that a prophet can have no honor in his own home.”*

Then, this morning, we sat outside and I had tried to explain to her that I have found a hidden treasure and I’m dying to tell others about what I found, even though most aren’t going to want to hear about it, because it a direction of swimming upstream, to get the treasure.

This afternoon I was outside reading the book “Knowing God”. I sit down and check my phone for the time and there was a 4:44pm. I said out loud, *“Ok, God, I know I’ve seen this number now several times the last week, what does it mean?”* I was not wanting to even think about it, but I felt convicted that I needed to do whatever it took to find out if indeed God was speaking about something to me. I said to myself, ok if I turn my phone screen back on and it’s still there, I’ll look it up, and sure enough there it was. I said, *“Where is it God...what scripture is it you want me to see?”* I started in Matthew and got to John and realized it was John 4:44 and then I started just laughing out loud and praising God.

John 4:44 - Now Jesus himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honor in his own country.

I just praised the Lord over and over and told him how awesome he was and how much I loved him and wanted to find even more of him. I told him to keep showing me more, so I could bring him more glory. The insight that the Spirit gave me with this Scripture was this, *“I know that what is happening with you doesn’t seem important or significant to your family, but it is important to me.”*

After receiving this word, I went to Taco Bell for dinner and saw a cute girl in the drive thru. It made me realize that each time I leave the house, I need to expect the devil to put things in my path to distract or trip me up. The thought was, *“Stay on your guard and expect something to happen...be alert.”* There is a lot at stake and the enemy knows it. I drove home, and the thought occurred to me... *“I bet I know why Charles Stanley is a recluse...he avoids trouble.”* I had met a local pastor one time named Jimmy Jackson who

knew Charles Stanley personally, and he was the one who had told me that Charles was a bit of a recluse, saying that is also why he was able to preach those unbelievable sermons he does.

August 16th, 2011

Suffering is always better on the other side of it. It's always easier to be thankful for suffering and to appreciate its effects on your soul, after the suffering is gone, rarely in the middle of its delivery. The biggest consequence I see with suffering is not the pain of the suffering itself, but rather the decisions that are made and actions that are taken, strictly out of emotion, during the suffering, which later bring even more difficult circumstances and more suffering.

There is a reason that Paul tells us in Ephesians 6 to do everything we can to STAND under the attack of the enemy. I believe one of our enemy's greatest tricks is to get us to REACT, during suffering. The pain is usually so bad already, that we want to do anything to get out from under it, or to attack the people or circumstances back, that are hurting us. Thus, we have decided in the flesh, in emotion, which will rarely be rational, or in line with the instruction of the Spirit, or in love.

As it turns out, I can see each time that I was suffering, that the enemy would use those times to inflict as much collateral damage as he possibly could. For example, when you are suffering, and you are having a very difficult time, he will capitalize on that and find some way to put another person in your path to aggravate you or push you over the edge. If he can get you to react to the other person's intrusion, he has just multiplied his casualties and multiplied how much of God's glory he can steal.

I have an example of this happening just recently. One time, Jennifer's attorney successfully manipulated an agreement, which I signed, stipulating that I would not remove the children from the state of FL ever, when it was only supposed to be for one visit. Her attorney, knowing I was representing myself, took it upon herself to present the agreement to the judge as a standing order for all future visits. She deceitfully failed to mention that the agreement between both parties, was only dated for one visit. The judge approved her motion, stipulating that I could never remove the children out of the state, meaning I could never have them visit my home in AL, without mutual written consent or a court order.

I began to instantly feel suffering from this brutal injustice. I received this letter at 3:30pm. I had been invited to dinner with my mother and my step-dad, the day before, to a friend of theirs that evening at 5:30pm. Needing to get away and suffer quietly and seek God's face on my situation, I went for a long walk. My step-father called 30 minutes into my walk and asked me where I was at. I told him I was out, doing my time in suffering, and that I obviously would not be in any mood to be a guest at someone's house for dinner. When I got home, my mother had left a note, stating the following: *"I'm sorry you got bad news, but we don't cancel on dinner invitations at the last minute. You are not the only one who has bad days, they would have understood your mood, etc..."*

That note made me almost as mad as the dishonest legal tactics being used against me to keep me from seeing my children. I began writhing with thoughts of *"How dare my mom be so worried about an extra pork chop being not being eaten, at a dinner that I was invited to as a "by the way" offer, while I'm dealing with the fact that I have just been done a huge injustice and now won't ever be able to bring my kids to AL, because I was tricked."* I couldn't believe the nerve of her to write that note, and naturally I had a strong desire to lash out against her error in judgment.

However, by the Lord's grace, I saw immediately what was going on. The devil already had me bent over from a punch in the gut, and the second person he uses to antagonize me, is my own mother, so here it came...an uppercut blow.

I wanted to pick up the phone, right then and call mom and let her know what I thought about it. I could easily think of some Scriptures that would justify my doing so, but my spirit said, walk away. So, I did, and being as wise as a serpent and as gentle as a dove, I stayed away from my mother for the next 24 hours, until I had dealt with the first battle, regarding the injustice. The enemy cannot win if we do not engage in the battle through reaction, but rather we take the time to respond. I could see what he was trying to do, and even though it would have felt good to tell my mother how poor her judgment was, there would have been no good that could come out of it, at that time, for she did not yet have ears to hear.

I can look back and remember two primary Biblical principles the Lord wanted me to learn from episodes like this with my mother. At that time, she was hostile to my relationship with God, and she was not yet born again of the Spirit of Christ. This also means she did not yet have ears to hear and I would suffer abuse for any corrections I tried to make.

Proverbs 9:7 – Whoever corrects a mocker invites insult; whoever corrects a wicked man incurs abuse.

If I didn't want to suffer the abuse, there was only one way out, since I couldn't just run from it. I was going to have to learn to walk in costly humility, where I abandoned the defense of myself and trusted my steps entirely to the Lord. There was no person on the planet who it was going to be more difficult to humble myself before, than my mother. It is easy to humble yourself before a person that treats you with dignity and who believes the same way as you. To humble yourself before an increasingly antagonistic enemy, who is driven to control you, is a much more difficult lesson. It was going to be a long time before these two lessons took deep root in my heart, and much tribulation was going to be needed, again because of how strong my nature was.

Satan wanted me to jump in and react to these painful events, taking back up arms in order to defend myself. That is not the way of Jesus, nor the way of the cross in which he carried, and it cannot be our way if we call ourselves His followers.

1 Peter 2:23 – When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

This is a very dangerous time when Satan is looking to multiply his casualties, while you are suffering. Be careful and do everything you can to take up your cross of self-denial and then just STAND and let the offense pass, while you dwell in the shelter of the Most High God!

On August 22nd 2011, I made a very long journal entry lamenting about the fact that I still felt so insecure, and especially when comparing myself to others who were working full-time for the Lord. I was perplexed and discouraged that I could still be struggling with this after all that I have suffered already, and after all the Lord's guidance and providence in my life now. I also noted that I was struggling with "perfectionistic" tendencies. I wrote, "*Father, you have given me such a strong desire for serving you and yet I turn around and become consumed with getting the message just right, saying it just right, writing it just right. I'm back focused on performance and back putting my eyes on me and my performance and NOT you and your people.*"

I continued in prayer on paper... "*Father...have MERCY on me. I am wickedly sinful. I am so sorry and mad at this sin nature Lord. And yet, I hear you say, "My strength is perfected in your weakness" and the Holy Spirit reminds me that Paul would rather have boasted in his weakness. Lord, I still do not get it! I'm a broken man, who continues to think, I will get there, I will arrive, I become stronger, I will rise above this, I will be a successful Christian. I am so frustrated sometimes by all of this. You have given me such a burden for you and to tell others about you. You have given me such a desire to be humble and yet, as soon*

as I take the first step towards having a ministry or whatever it is, I begin instantly thinking about “How I will do it all or how I will be received or how I will measure up.” That is my horrible, sinful and broken flesh, screaming to be known, screaming to have its needs met, screaming to be set free from INSECURITY. I know better Father and you have shown me better, and yet around every other corner, there it is...insecurity and its evil offspring pride. I continue to struggle with this. I want to be NOTHING in my spirit, but the world and my flesh are screaming, “You need to prove yourself and make yourself known if you are going to want to make a big deal out of God.” I DESPISE THIS!! Father, it is feelings like this, that make me just want to QUIT the book, take down my website and do nothing with anyone beyond the 3 or 4 people that you may put in my life, through church or life. Maybe I’m just thinking too big. It all seems like too much of a slippery slope, too easy to fall back into the PIT. My first thought as I write these words is, “This is exactly what the devil is trying to get you to do....quit.” WOW!

The journal entry continued with my becoming more and more conscious of my need to trust God for the results of any work He calls me to, and to stop worrying so much about my own efforts, skills, approaches, creativity, etc. This was part of the early battle of my learning to distinguish between the Lord’s work in me, vs my work for Him. This was going to be a long lesson for me to learn because my whole life in sales and business were always about my efforts and skills being directed to achieve the greatest results.

I also wrote about feeling such a burden for all the evil and the problems in the world. By the evening of that day, I had seen another 666 followed by an email from Jennifer denying me my legal rights to see the children on a Wednesday night, while I was visiting down in FL. I received a phone call from a friend after that, which God ended up using to really encourage me.

August 30th, 2011

WOW! WOW! WOW! This might be one of the most important entries, I’ve made in sometime.

While driving to FL yesterday, I spent several hours listening to “Desiring God” and praying. At 3:32pm my mother called to remind me to contact my friend’s attorney and see about him representing me at the divorce trial.

About a week ago, my mother and I got into a serious disagreement because she was insisting on me hiring another attorney after we fired my first one, in spite of the fact that I had told her that the Lord is telling me not to try to defend myself. I had told her weeks earlier, that I believed the Lord was heavily invested in what was going on behind the scenes in this divorce, and that I had the strong impression that he was going to do something way “beyond” typical to resolve it, such that he would bring himself much Glory. I had already heard in my spirit that He would do it in such a way that it would be highly unusual and not simply because I had a better attorney, etc. This was a very clear word and it been confirmed by my reading of 2 Samuel 24:12-15...Three Times!

As I shared my conviction in this with my mother, her frustration began to increasingly grow. She pointed out that she heard me explaining to Tyler one night on the phone, the difference between ignorance and stupidity. She used that to point out that she believed I was being ignorant in this matter. Her argument was that I just needed someone to defend me in the trial. I ended up conceding to her at one point and said “Well, maybe I should just do that.” I agreed to call my friend, while I was in FL, to find out the name of his attorney.

(Let me pause and make a note here to eliminate any confusion: Back in chapter 22, I mentioned seeing the 666’s, and I also briefly mentioned seeing 555’s and what they meant. However, by mentioning it already, I had gotten ahead of the chronological order of when that actually happened.

I have since gone back and removed the mention of the 555's in the chapter 22 video on YouTube, so that it now is only mentioned in chronological order of when it actually happened, which is the story you are about to hear.)

While I was driving to FL, mom called me to remind me about calling the attorney. Her call came in at 3:32pm. A little while later while thinking about this, I looked down and blatantly saw that is was 5:55pm. I've seen this # several times over the last few weeks and been asking the Lord over and over to tell me what he is trying to tell me. The last few #'s 222 and 444, have both been specific scriptures that the Lord wanted me to see.

555 is not a scripture of any kind that relates to my situations, either as 55:5 or 5:55. So, a few days ago, it showed up and the thought occurred to me that maybe it's a page # in the Bible, rather than an actual scripture this time, but I never looked, because I didn't have my Bible on me at the time.

So yesterday, when 555 came up, I felt COMPELLED to see if it was a page number. I didn't end up reading it, until I got to Larry's last night. I turn to the page and I see 2 Kings 19 entitled "Jerusalem's Deliverance Foretold."

I read it and thought "OH, MY GOODNESS GRACIOUS." The Lord is trying to speak to me about the divorce attorney and this whole defending myself thing. In this story, King Hezekiah is being threatened by the King of Assyria and being warned, "*DO NOT be a fool, for your god will not deliver you out of my hands. Have the gods of the other nations been able to deliver them out of my hands?* So, this morning, I re-read and meditated on it. I got on my knees beside Larry's couch, and I was forced to turn sideways because of the small space between the couch and the coffee table. I began lifting my hands in prayer to the Lord and asking him to please confirm for me that this is about me NOT even hiring an attorney for the final trial, and just completely trusting in HIM to defend me all the way through. While I was praying, I was facing towards Larry's reading chair and his little book stand with his daily devotionals on it. I looked down and my eyes went straight to Oswald Chambers book, "My Utmost for his highest." I felt the impression that there might be a confirmation in it, so I looked up today's message. Nothing related, so I thought, well, I got the 555 yesterday and read it yesterday, so what does yesterday's message say. To my utter delight, here is what yesterday's message said. WOW!!!

My Utmost for His Highest - Oswald Chambers

August 29th, 2011

Jesus said to her, 'Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?' —John 11:40

Every time you venture out in your life of faith, you will find something in your circumstances that, from a commonsense standpoint, will flatly contradict your faith. But common sense is not faith, and faith is not common sense. In fact, they are as different as the natural life and the spiritual. Can you trust Jesus Christ where your common sense cannot trust Him? Can you venture out with courage on the words of Jesus Christ, while the realities of your commonsense life continue to shout, "It's all a lie"? When you are on the mountaintop, it's easy to say, "Oh yes, I believe God can do it," but you have to come down from the mountain to the demon-possessed valley and face the realities that scoff at your Mount-of-Transfiguration belief (see [Luke 9:28-42](#)). Every time my theology becomes clear to my own mind, I encounter something that contradicts it. As soon as I say, "I believe 'God shall supply all [my] need,' " the testing of my faith begins ([Philippians 4:19](#)). When my strength runs dry and my vision is blinded, will I endure this trial of my faith victoriously or will I turn back in defeat?

Faith must be tested, because it can only become your intimate possession through conflict. What is challenging your faith right now? The test will either prove your faith right, or it will kill it. Jesus said, “Blessed is he who is not offended because of Me” [Matthew 11:6](#)). The ultimate thing is confidence in Jesus. “We have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end . . .” ([Hebrews 3:14](#)). Believe steadfastly on Him and everything that challenges you will strengthen your faith. There is continual testing in the life of faith up to the point of our physical death, which is the last great test. Faith is absolute trust in God— trust that could never imagine that He would forsake us (see [Hebrews 13:5-6](#)).

Devotionals like this are another way that the Lord regularly confirms things for me. I feel certain, that the Lord is telling me to “TRUST HIM”, not the common-sense direction of my friends and family. He is asking me to stand in obedient faith to Him. I feel that He is telling me NOT to hire the attorney and simply show up and watch him do His thing. This absolutely looks like lunacy to everyone around me, but I’m not responsible to them, rather to God. I have trust in HIM, not in them and I have known in my spirit for a long time, that God wished to bring himself Glory out of this situation. Praise you LORD for continually teaching me, speaking to me and directing me. I’m NOT WORTHY of this kind of attention from the King of the Universe. I love you so much Lord!!!!

2 Samuel 7:19 – And as if this were not enough in your sight, O Sovereign Lord, you have also spoken about the future of the house of your servant. Is this your usual way of dealing with man, O Sovereign Lord?

September 18th, 2011

I met with a local pastor this past week. I attended his church twice, once of which he spoke. I enjoyed his message and felt like I could sense he was preaching hard truth. I met with him and kindly asked him to watch a very short summarized video version of my story before we met, so he could see where I was coming from.

When we met, he seemed more subdued than when I introduced myself to him at the church. I don’t know what happened, but something didn’t feel right to me. We met for 1.5 hours and I spoke maybe 10 minutes of that time...the rest was hearing his entire life story. I’m not sure if he felt inadequate or something, but he didn’t ask me a single question of me...to see what God was doing. I enjoyed listening to his story, but I left feeling like “he didn’t get it.”

I think I’m still just trying too hard to get plugged in somewhere. I’m so disappointed that I can’t find a church that doesn’t feel like I’m going completely backwards! I decided to stay home and read Knowing God this morning, rather than another disappointing trip to a church. I asked the Lord what he thinks about me not being able to find a church that sits right with my new relationship and understanding of Him. The impression I got was that He wants me ALL to himself right now, similar to many stories in the bible, there are times when someone is set apart and taken to a lonely place with the Lord, sometimes for years. I sense that he wants my undivided attention and doesn’t want me sitting under some teaching that isn’t fully pure or has been compromised by other motives. I also sense that He knows if I connect, there will be people pulling on me and distracting me from the work that He hasn’t finished doing in me yet. This being set apart, almost feels unfair, as it relates to others...I mean how many people get this opportunity?

Psalm 4:3 – “Know that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself...”

I want to journal something important about sin too. A few weeks ago, my girlfriend came over and we got into a gray area, sexually. We had already, previously fallen into sexual temptation three times and by

now we had agreed to remain pure and not to have sex until and unless we were ever married. Even after this agreement, we ended up doing something that while to some might not seem like sin, to me it was. It violated my conscience and that means it was sin (Romans 14:23). I immediately told her about it and said we need to pull back even farther and just leave all that kind of stuff for after marriage. I noticed afterwards that I felt this distance between myself and the Lord and it terrified me. I couldn't feel the presence of the Holy Spirit, like I normally do, and it made me lose the closeness I normally feel.

I also noticed that after this stumble into sexual sin, I began to struggle with seeing pretty woman...they seemed to suddenly come out of nowhere and it seemed like I was surrounded by temptations. I even had a bad dream that involved me having sex with another woman, who was completely made up by my imagination. I woke up very mad about it. I also noticed that I started becoming more distracted and more vulnerable to sexual desire in my body.

I repented, and twice got on my knees, asking the Lord to forgive me and to have mercy on me. I thanked him for his grace and told him I didn't want to do anything to ruin what we have. Looking back on this incident, I can see something important. Before I had this close of a relationship with the Lord, the consequences of sin didn't really seem to have much of an impact in that area of my life, because there wasn't much to lose, whereas now there is. Even more sinister, I can see how the sin, not only created separation from the Lord and prevented the Holy Spirit from ministering to me and filling me up, but it also seemed to open the door to the schemes and temptations of the flesh and the devil. The Lord soon showed me that this is because I had taken off my breastplate of righteousness, and was now vulnerable to the arrows of the enemy (Ephesians 6:14).

I'm thrilled to be learning this powerful lesson and these are tremendous incentives NOT to walk in sin and disobedience. After this happened, I repented and asked the Lord to please let me know that He is still with me and communing with me, because I felt a loss in the closeness. I hadn't seen any #'s in a while and I wasn't receiving answers from the Holy Spirit, to my prayers or things I was pondering. It felt like I was having to strive to hear the Lord and I had lost that close connection. This was a terrifying feeling.

The next day, to the praise of God's mercy, I saw 3:33 on the clock and said, "*Ok, Lord...thank you very much.*" I looked it up and discovered it was Jeremiah 33:3, "*Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.*"

Explaining the Numbers

Job 33:14 – For God does speak—now one way, now another—though man may not perceive it.

As I end this chapter, I wish to again mention some warnings and explanation about my stories of seeing numbers. First, there is nothing extra-Biblical or unbiblical about this at all, just because others may have not perceived it.

No one of even the faintest intelligence can read the Bible without concluding that God Almighty is indeed a God of numbers. Everything He has spoken, or done, or will do, in the Bible is associated to numbers. There is not one single important event in all of Scripture, the creation, the flood, the exodus, the wilderness journey, the entrance into the promised land, the exile and punishment of the Israelites, the coming of Christ, the writings of Christ, the crucifixion of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, and the second coming of Christ, that do not have God ordained numbers associated with them.

There are truly unbelievable mathematics in the Bible that cannot even be seen at first glance, all hidden beneath the surface. Just one example is in how many incredible ways the genealogy of Jesus Christ, both the words, the nouns, the verbs, and even the consonants and vowels are divisible by the number 7 in more

ways than any human could have ever written. Another one can be seen in the book of John, my favorite, which is built on 777. There are 7 miracles, 7 “I am” statements, and 7 discourses. Some are not even in Scripture, but still remain true and astonishing such as the fact that Jesus Christ was crucified on Mount Golgotha which stood at an altitude of 777 meters above sea level. The greatest Mathematician that there has ever been is the Almighty God of the Bible!

Throughout Scripture God has spoken in a variety of strange ways, through the clouds, through a burning bush, through a supernatural hand writing on the wall, through a talking donkey, through evil spirits, through dreams, etc. If the God of the Bible is the Great, I AM, and not the great I WAS, then why should we be surprised that He still loves and uses numbers? I don’t believe any of us should remain surprised, that in a digital age created by man, God is able take advantage of this medium, in order to providentially guide his servant to a passage in the Word of God for guidance or instruction. For two thousand years, Christian history is filled with astonishing or perplexing ways in which the hand of the Lord guided His servants to a timely passage in His book, other than them simply coming across it in their morning reading plan.

There are many counterfeits of this where people get into numerology, angel numbers, and new age meanings of numbers that have NOTHING to do with the truth and the word of God. They are all terribly deceptive and you will recognize that tree by its fruit. God has never led me to see numbers that have any meaning outside of a page number, or actual scripture reference in His Word, with the exception of the 666, which was simply used as a warning for evil. God only uses numbers with me as a means of guiding me to Scripture passages in His living and all sufficient word. There is NO NEED to go beyond the Bible for spiritual insight or guidance.

Psalm 19:7 – The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

2 Timothy 3:16 – All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Secondly, the numbers mean absolutely NOTHING apart from the insight and teaching of the Holy Spirit. There are numbers everywhere in our life today. I might see 100 or more different numbers today just in my daily business and all of them might be meaningless and I should not drive myself crazy looking for numbers, or trying to figure out if any of them have meaning.

When the Lord has wanted to show me a passage of Scripture, I have always been given insight by His Spirit that this was a number I was supposed to see and secondly the meaning is also given to me. God’s word is living and active (Hebrews 4:12) and incredibly, the Holy Spirit can give you a customized application to a verse which is specific to your situation. For example, when the Lord showed me Mark 2:22, He also gave me a living and active meaning behind that verse for my specific situation. How incredible is the living and enduring word of God!

That verse in Mark, spoken by Jesus, has it’s first and primary meaning in the idea that you cannot take Jesus Christ or His Spirit, which is the new wine, and pour them into the old wineskins of the external rules and regulations of the Law of Moses. Just as Paul taught in Romans 8 and throughout His letters, the Law of sin and death cannot be mixed with the law of the Spirit and life. We no longer live by the letter (old

wine) which brings death, but by the Spirit (new wine) which brings life. You cannot pour new wine or new life into the old wineskins of death without them being ruined.

That is the true Biblical meaning of that parable but look how the Holy Spirit was able to use it and give it a custom meaning for my exact situation, by telling me not to go back to sales and motivational speaking after this new work had just been done in my heart by the Spirit. How unbelievably awesome is our Lord! As you keep reading, you will later hear how the Lord used that same passage another time to warn me about music and even things like masturbation.

There are even many times where I was given the insight that I would see a number before I did, and then shortly thereafter, there it was. This is the living Holy Spirit ministering the living Word of God to me and giving me insight in my heart.

I've already been accused of being a heretic or a Christian mystic for mentioning my seeing numbers which I see as a blessing, but I don't want those who are really wanting to learn how to walk with God to stumble or be deceived. When I first started seeing the numbers, I was shocked and constantly amazed and had never heard of this before. Today, with a ministry that reaches around the world, I have heard stories of many people who see numbers and feel God has used them to guide them. Still others write to me, saying they see certain numbers and they do not know what they mean. That is why you must have insight from the Holy Spirit. Even if you saw a certain verse three times today, apart from the insight of the Holy Spirit, it will be meaningless.

The most important point I wish to make is that God's Word is everything we need for life and godliness in Christ Jesus, and if we wait upon Him, if we desire His will more than ours, if we fear Him and want to please Him by obeying Him, we must expect God to speak and guide us and however He chooses to do it, that is His business.

Incredibly, as I just finished my final edits on this chapter in the explanation of the numbers, I looked down and saw that the word count for this completed chapter is 7,777 words. There are no coincidences with a Sovereign God who works out everything in accordance to His good purpose, even the number of words written in a chapter about His wondrous works in someone's life. Is this only a bizarre coincidence, or is it the mighty hand of God in answer to my prayers just this morning to guide every word I write for His glory? I know the answer, do you?

Incredibly, after a second round of edits on this chapter, this was the final word count, after just writing the explanation of numbers.

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Chapter 25

Satan's Many Strategies of Opposition

1 Thessalonians 2:18 – For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, did, again and again—but Satan stopped us.

September 22nd, 2011

The last few days have been heavy days. I cried for twenty minutes the other night, on my knees about the condition of my Grandpa Carl's soul. He was the grandfather who had pretty much written me off, when I was 12 years old, because he walked into the backyard where I was kicking the soccer ball, and in a playful moment, I blurted out, "Hey boy...whatcha doing?" As a result of that one comment, I had to stay behind while he took the rest of the entire family, including my mother, to his home in Mexico for a vacation. He never pursued a relationship with me after that, except the one time he took me to the post office with him, when I was in high school, where he let me help him open checks from his investment accounts totaling in the millions. That experience only influenced me to lust after money even more, and to still believe that one day I was going to be rich like him.

Now, all these years later he was living in Costa Rica and needed to have a routine heart surgery. He flew to Huntsville, to have the surgery so his three daughters, one of which was my mom could take care of him. After the surgery, he contracted an infection that they cannot now seem to stop.

I went to see him in the hospital, with my mom. Seeing this man, who lived a life of such wealth and opulence, luxury and personal pleasure seeking, now all shriveled up in a hospital bed, helpless and scared like a little child, was very heart breaking. This was in sharp contrast to the intimidating prideful man he had been his whole life.

Galatians 6:7-8 Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

When I saw him, my heart had more compassion for him than I could have ever imagined. I was so sad to see this man, in this condition, having thrown his whole life away to the pursuit of empty pleasures that were now coming to nothing. My grandfather had been to all the countries in the world, with the exception of about five countries. He was a man who had truly seen all that the world has to offer.

Matthew 16:26 – What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?

My mother and I stood on one side of his bed, and my aunt Becky on the other. I could feel the utter sadness in my soul for him. He muttered through his mask, "Hi Mikey", and I could see surprise in his eyes, to see me. He didn't make much eye contact with me after that, but mostly talked with my mom and aunt. Standing patiently, by his bedside, a quiet moment finally came, to which I spoke up, "Grandpa, I'm very sorry that you are having such a hard time and I want you to know that I'm praying for you." He mumbled thank you.

A few minutes later, I was on his right side and the nurses and my mom and aunt had moved away from his bed to talk. I wanted so badly to tell him about Jesus Christ. He was a very hard and intimidating man to most people. Even though, we all knew he might have MRSA (staph infection) and that it is highly contagious, I knew I needed to get close and speak to him. I bent down and put my face near his ear and said *“Grandpa...I’m very sorry to see you hurting like this, please ask God to help you.”* He said, *“I am... every day.”*

He began telling me his pillow was making him uncomfortable, so I reached over and began manipulating it to see if I could help him get more comfortable. I tried for a few minutes and finally he said, *“What about this one?”*, pointing to the small pillow in his chest. I put it under his head and got him comfortable and he was thankful.

By now, my mom, could tell that he and I were having a moment and she asked everyone to walk outside the room with her. He rolled his head in my direction and said, *“I don’t think I’m going to make it, Mikey”*. I leaned down, touched his hand, and asked him how that made him feel. He said, *“afraid”*.

I said, *“Grandpa, I know that we haven’t had much of a relationship, but I’ve been through some pretty tough stuff in the last few years of my life, and I can tell you that I have had peace through it all, because of the Lord Jesus Christ. You don’t have to be afraid of dying Grandpa, you can have peace and God can help you.”* He didn’t say anything, so I said, *“let me just pray for you.”* This was the very man who wouldn’t ever come to our family Thanksgiving dinners because we said a prayer.

John 3:19-20 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

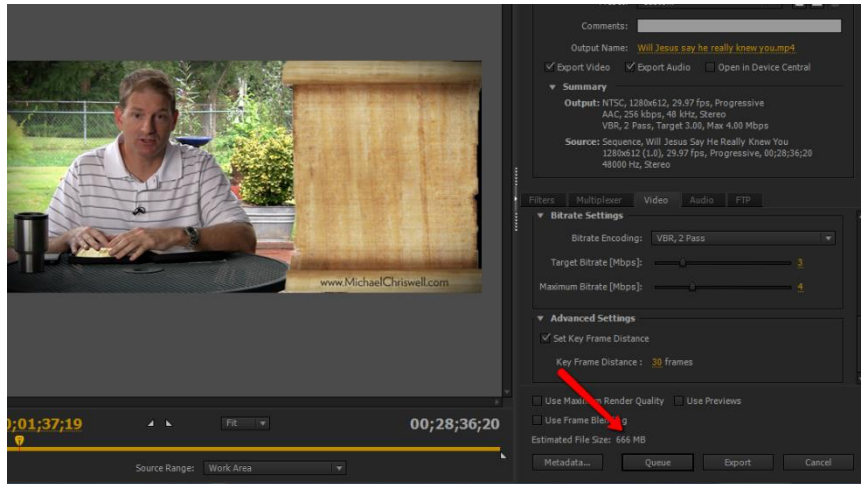
I laid my hand on his shoulder and began praying out loud for the Lord to have mercy on him and to help him and to have compassion on him. I prayed that He would direct the hands of the doctors and that he would be ok. I wanted to tell him more about Jesus and about sin and death, but I knew that the timing wasn’t right, but I at least got a chance to plant a seed.

The next day I felt down again, like I was somehow responsible for his eternal destiny, and that I didn’t get to share enough. I wanted to go back and had plans to go when no other visitors would be there to see him. It turns out that before I could get back, they moved him back to UAB in Birmingham. I’m praying for him daily and hope to get back down to see him and share the Romans road to salvation with him. The first shall be last, and the last shall be first. Lord willing, maybe he will put someone in his path to water the seeds I have planted. I’m very sad about the whole thing.

That night, I got on my knees beside my bed and I literally cried my eyes out for about 15 to 20 minutes, before the Lord. I felt such compassion for him and others that don’t know Christ. Even now, I could tear up about it. I could see how God must feel about his lost sheep and how even though, we look at others and judge them, God looks at them and feels so much love and sadness for them. He stands there, with open arms, while they continue to ignore and reject his love, his joy and his comforts and peace.

I can see why Jesus had such compassion, saying, *“Forgive them Father, for they know NOT what they do.”* Oh, how my heart aches. The saddest thing in creation is to lose your soul in eternal separation from the God, who created you to be with Him forever.

September 30th, 2011



By now, I had set up my site, MichaelChriswell.com to be a ministry website where I could start sharing about Christ. I was just getting started in making a few video messages for my blog, which I was hosting on Vimeo. I found in the very beginnings of any ministry attempts I made, I came under very intentional harassment by evil spirits. They attacked me back in 2010, trying to scare me and prevent me from sharing the

first ever video I posted to my business subscribers, testifying that Jesus Christ was a big part of my life. Now, in an email to three of my closest friends, I shared a bizarre demonic harassment I experienced as I began the first stages of my video ministry. I write...

"I've been working so hard on my ministry videos the last few days and really promoting Jesus and trying to get the word out. Last night I had a dream, where I'm not able to tell how much of it might have occurred while I was sleeping or awake, it was very bizarre! I was laying in my bed on my right side. A medium sized demon came and landed on my side in a squatted down position. Then he jumped off my side and tried to jump into my body entering me via my stomach area. I could feel the sensation in my stomach and I began tightening my stomach muscles and groaning very loudly and at the same time, I started asking the Lord Jesus Christ for help. The fight then only lasted a few more seconds and he was instantly powerless. I woke up from it...shook it off, smiled and went right back to sleep as if nothing ever happened, because as scary as the attempt of demon possession was, the feeling of the POWER of Christ, was COMPLETELY OVERWHELMING....it made me smile and have total peace. Then, later that day, I was re-rendering a new HD version of a teaching video I just put on my site, yesterday. The video title is, "Will Jesus Say He Really Knew You?". In this video I'm talking about how even the demons *believe* in Jesus, and I'm asking, "Do you think *they* are going to heaven?" I explained that many think they are saved and will in fact hear the words, "Flee from me, for I never knew you." So, I begin my file export and the finished file size of that video is, 666MB (see red arrow in pic). Praise the Lord, that he warns me of these things, but please pray for me and my continued protection. I'm pushing into very deep waters and I'm going pretty much by myself. I know these videos are going to help a few people and set them free from the lies of Satan and the bondage that he has them in. He doesn't want that. The Holy Spirit was truly empowering me doing these videos.

Then I saw these first two comments that came in about this video and I can see that THE DEVIL HATES THIS WORK!

"This is absolutely the most amazing thing I have ever heard in 48 years of my life." – Comment from Bobby P., after previewing this video.

And then the second one...

"Thank you, Michael,...this video brought me to crying out loud...it has made me feel so terrible and unfit as a person of God. And I mean that in a good way. It has to be the beginning of now looking at life with my

eyes wide open. Why can't I stop crying after watching this...what is happening?" –Crystal, after previewing video.

October 2nd, 2011

I spent a little while on the internet trying to find a church last night. I have been so disappointed about the whole church thing. I don't understand why I can't find one that I agree with, or that doesn't feel so much like I'm going backwards.

I found one on the other side of town that seemed a lot like the type of church I enjoy. I decided to go and try it out. I really liked it on my first visit. The sanctuary was VERY inviting, and the music was incredible. I've been ALL by myself for four months now and I'm at a place where I can tell that I really want to connect. I'm quite tender the last few days. I gave a man my guest communication card and he said he would have someone contact me about a small group.

I left the church and went to Barnes and Noble at Bridgestreet. While I was at Barnes and Noble, I started thinking about reaching out to the black folks over in the projects I always drive past on University Drive. For some reason, I've visualized myself, just going over there and meeting some folks and hanging out and talking with them, getting to know them and stuff.

So here I was at Barnes, thinking about that, when I picked up a book called "Finding Your Cause" or something like that. It was by a young pastor in L.A, who started the Dream Center, helping the "helpless" and "homeless" in a bad area. He talked about the sheer joy of giving his life to the Lord's purposes and how incredible it feels to help and serve others.

While I was reading this, I began thinking more and more about going over to those projects and finding some people to talk to. Even though it sounded so scary, I visualized myself, just sitting around talking these folks and taking an interest in them. They are always sitting outside on their white plastic chairs talking and I wanted to be a part of that! I wanted to get to know them, to hear their stories, to understand them better. At one point, I even thought that maybe I could eventually do some part time discipling. I got chocked up and started to cry a little thinking about it. I felt like God was really softening my heart to this idea and increasing my desire to do it, even though it was scary, and according to some, stupid and unsafe.

Knowing that I got so emotional about it, I said, "ok, Lord, I'll go try it out." On the way there, I had some anxiety, but the more I thought about it the more I realized I had to do it. I visualized myself sitting down with a group of them, and just hanging out and talking and then saying, "*Hey, could anyone eat some chicken?*" I visualized taking one of them with me to go get a big ole bucket of fried chicken and then just sitting around having dinner with them and making new friends. I started to cry very hard while driving down the road, thinking about how wonderful this would be.

So, I drove past the front of the projects for a once over and realized that not many people were outside. I said, "*Oh, well, I'll drive through and see what I can see.*" I drove down one street and saw two ladies and a teenager sitting outside on their plastic chairs and I said, "*Ok, here I go.*"

I pulled up by their little apartment and they watched me pull up. They looked at me very carefully to see if they could figure out who it was. I was the only white person in the whole neighborhood, so I suspect they were wondering why I was there. I was wearing my dress shirt and blue jeans from church, but I wasn't overdressed.

I started walking towards them and they looked very uncomfortable. It is amazing how real our invisible territory boundaries are, even among people, especially by race. We *all* knew that I did *not* belong there. I walked up and said, *"Hello...I know this must seem weird, a complete stranger just walking up here, but I can assure you I'm a nice guy and I don't want anything from you.* I told them that believe it or not, I had driven past the neighborhood several times and I felt drawn to it and that I felt God just wanted me to come over and meet some new people and maybe even buy dinner."

Even as I'm writing this, I can see how foolish it seems that I would do something like this, and even more that I would expect to be received by them, but my heart compelled me to do this. I tend to be able to do the things I'm most afraid of. It's like hitting the big jump at a motocross track the first time...something in me, just says, *"go for it"* and I almost *always* do.

As I was trying my best to tell them why I was there, the younger black lady, said that she was actually getting ready to go, and the teenager got up and said he needed to make a call....I could tell that he just wanted to get out of there, probably because I mentioned God.

They barely looked me in the eyes. It wasn't going anything like I hoped or had imagined. I recall this same thing happening to God, which Jesus explains in a parable in Matthew 21:37. God himself is saying through this parable that He thought that the people would surely receive his Son, but they did not.

My sincere heart and godly desire to be kind to them and make friends with them, was being totally rejected. When they had all but rejected my offer, I asked them if they knew of any family or elderly lady, close by, that might appreciate a meal and nice conversation. They said they didn't know of anyone. I could tell, they really just wanted me to leave. I was so disappointed. I said, *"Well, thank you very much for chatting and I'm sorry for interrupting...God bless you guys.* They said, *"alright, well thanks."* I felt like the older lady, was starting to realize I was being sincere, just as I was leaving.

I drove around the neighborhood looking for any other possible families, I could do this with. Everyone stared at me, because I was a white man out of place, but I just waved and smiled at everyone. I passed an old man on his porch and waved at him and he waved back, and I thought... *"I should stop and just talk to him and tell him what happened...maybe he could give me some help."* But, I just decided to keep going. I drove past a few more places, but nothing jumped out at me and said, "stop here". I felt so defeated and confused. I pulled out to the main road and said, *"God, what happened here...this didn't go ANYTHING like I thought it would...why did you burden my heart to do this and then have me be rejected like this?"*

I got home, still just perplexed about how it went down and trying to make meaning out of what happened. I felt almost depressed about it. About two hours later, I decided to just lay on the floor in the living room, and meditate on it, while listening to relaxing music. I practically demanded from the Lord to teach me what had just happened and to give me insight. Not even a minute later, I began hearing this in my spirit.

"Now you have a better understanding of how I feel, when people reject my gift, the most valuable gift ever given, my crucified Son, Jesus Christ. Those people didn't trust you enough to receive your sincere heart, and gift to them. The same is true of my gift. People don't trust Me and because they don't trust Me, they won't accept My free gift to them. Those people thought you had ulterior motives, just as many people feel that I have ulterior motives."

I was so moved to hear this and even now, I could just sob if I wasn't sitting at this Starbucks. For the first time in my 21 years of being a Christian, I can empathize and feel a sense of the pain, God feels when people constantly reject his love and his sacrifice, through Jesus Christ.

This is a side of God, that I have never really thought about, or been able to empathize with. The God Head and his unbelievable love and FREE gift is rejected every single day, by thousands of people. It breaks my heart, but I now I know why God wanted me to have this experience. This is a story that I suspect I will share for years to help people understand that they are rejecting the most valuable gift they could ever be given, simply because they don't trust Him.

This morning during my quiet time, I realized that this lesson also applies to Christians who don't fully know him or walk with him. They do not fully trust God, and thus they refuse to surrender their entire life and accept his gift of spiritual intimacy and the amazing joy thereof. Instead, they hold on to what they have with a death grip...missing the greatest gift, fullness in Christ, simply because they refuse to Trust.

October 3rd, 2011

I do not feel well today. I feel low on energy physically and mentally and I feel like I'm weak spiritually, as well. I can feel myself being a little anxious today. While editing a video for Brent Baldasare, one of my clients, I searched the internet for a before picture of one of his new partners that he wants me to show in the video. I landed on a site with before and after pics of "successful" people and their stories. I felt that enticement and that sense of, *"that should be you, but you are going the opposite direction...you should be living large like these folks, but no, you have settled for the simple life and will miss out...you should be in the limelight...you should be going after it, so you aren't left behind."*

My whole body just feels weak. I feel like I could go to sleep sitting here at this Starbucks. While reading the Bible this morning, I got tired and I feel like I'm sitting here with a sour look on my face. I think I forgot to take an allergy pill this morning and I think the allergens are heavy right now. It seems to drain me of my energy for some reason.

I spent some time, thinking about my work life this morning and after paying my insurance, I got a little anxious thinking about where my future income is going to come from and what my work life should look like. I started thinking about becoming an expert in video marketing and then my first concern was how will I have enough time to do what I want to do for the Lord with writing and videos? I had a small thought that I might see 2:22 after having these kinds of temptations and anxieties today.

I got ready to get in the shower and connected my phone to the speakers at my pc, so I could listen to music. As soon as I turned my screen on, I saw it was 12:22...there was 2:22, just like almost every other time I have been anxious about my work life vs my ministry efforts. I said, "Lord is this coincidental?" I got in the shower and began repenting from being anxious again and for being so weak about this. I asked the Lord to help me. I am weak today...I need Christ. I need the Holy Spirit to strengthen me and to lift me up, to sustain me and to keep me from stumbling. This world and its desires are always calling, always seducing, always tempting. I do not enjoy these days, when I don't feel well because of my sinuses...what a bummer, but I have to just trust that I can't do anything about it.

Tonight, I went with Bob to Sam's and upon leaving the store, I see a tire for sale for \$222. That was the second time seeing it, after asking God if the first was just a coincidence?

October 4th, 2011

I was just lying on the couch about to read the word, and I was wondering if my old pastor and friend Greg M. had any feelings of jealousy now that I'm heading towards the ministry. He and I have swapped places, as he went from the ministry to the marketplace, and I'm going from the marketplace to the ministry. I was thinking in my head about a message I heard recently that people should be jealous of what we have in the

Lord, and they should want that kind of relationship with Him. Just then the phone rings and interrupts my thinking. It's my friend Rick G. from Florida, who read my story about going into the projects and he said, "Mike, I know envy is not a good word, but I'm envious of you and the relationship you are having with the Lord." I was so blessed to have this happen.

I sent out the first 3 videos from my Knowing God vs. Knowing About God series. I prayed that the Lord would bring himself Glory with this and get it to the people that need to hear it.

October 5th, 2011

I woke up this morning, thinking about how so many of my friends and people I know are really trapped between their desire for God and their desire for marketplace success. I was meditating on the fact that the "market place ministry" movement has even emboldened many entrepreneurs to keep chasing more worldly success and it's all being justified by sprinkling it with a good bit of Jesus and church talk.

I see now that God is not impressed with the number of entrepreneurs and "great thinking and creative minds" in this country. I think the truth is that most Christian entrepreneurs in this country, worship the god of mammon, and leave little to no room for The Most High God—just enough to quiet their conscience.

I know this is a very difficult message that no one will want to hear, and many will fight against it because it confronts their pleasures and comforts. I think the key is for me to point out the truth, show it with scripture, and pose the question, "Are you at all bothered by this...Do you have that tension in your soul?" Then I need to point people to begin being obedient in this area, yielding to the Lord and completely trusting the Lord for the results.

My friend Rick G. is struggling with this right now. His wife is telling him that he needs to use his communication gift to get in the motivational speaking business and make millions. He is feeling very torn and it all sounds so familiar to me. She is headed in one direction towards, more and more, and he is being called by Christ to less and less, through contentment, so he can serve the Lord in the way of the Spirit. I do not believe his marriage is going to make it, if he wants to stay on the narrow path with Christ, knowing how driven she is for money and success.

Monday October 10th, 2011

I'm having another sinus-tired day where I just feel so out of it...like I could just go to sleep. I made the mistake of sitting outside this morning before taking any allergy medicine.

Over the last few days, during my quiet times, I have felt that same old sense of, "how can I get this message out there?" "what should I say?" "when should I say it?" "how should I brand it?" These thoughts come on pretty strong. Then, when I realize that I'm having "performance" based thoughts, I instantly feel in my spirit, "Michael, the Lord will do the work and promote his message through you, in His way, when He wants; you don't have to do the promotion or the striving." I keep realizing that I could sit here for years trying to create a perfect strategy, when the Lord can promote me in seconds to exactly where He wants.

This requires trust and patience. I see this more and more as something we all must get. I can't think of anyone in the Bible, that sat down and made a great plan about how they were going to evangelize or carry on the message of the cross. Rather, they showed up and trusted God for the results. Most often, He provided, and called them from places that that they would have rather stayed at.

October 14th, 2011

WOW, what a day! This has turned out to be a very hard day.

1. A few nights ago, I have the scariest dream I've ever had. Jennifer is trying to kill me, and at one point she looks so evil, like the devil has possessed her, and she is coming at me screaming bloody murder and I then wake up, just before I know she is going to kill me. I wake up so scared and just thinking about how evil she looked, like a demon, it made me have major chills in my skin, even later after I was out of bed. It scared the daylights out of me.

2. Today we are driving to FL and on the way, we stop in Birmingham, so my mom can see her Dad, who has somewhat started to recover again. When she comes out of the hospital, she tells us that he has been freaking out and scared to death and now they are ordering a Psych evaluation, because he claims he is seeing demons. When the one male nurse walked in while my mom was there, grandpa started screaming...that's him, that's him...he's a demon and so is some other lady. He is so scared that he hasn't been sleeping, because he's so afraid to go to sleep and he keeps asking who is going to stay with him. He swears he is seeing demons and my mom says he seems able to talk normal and he knows about everything else that is going on.

3. A few miles into the trip, we all start talking about the devil and demons and dying and stuff like that...mom starts asking questions about it, so we answer. I feel led to put in a cd by a well-known minister on spiritual warfare, so my mother can hear what scripture says and see that hell and demons are for REAL. We get 5 min into it and she says... *"I can't listen to this...I don't like this guy and I can tell already, he's not my kind of teacher."* I was visibly upset, but kept my cool, the devil was doing exactly what he needed to, to keep her blind. It's quite incredible to see the spiritual warfare, so blatantly like that. It was incredibly obvious. I kept my cool and pushed right past it, being nice.

4. My step dad and I both see 666 on the back of a person's license plate. We stop to eat 30 min later and there it was...a revolting email from Jennifer, again denying me anything more than minimal time with the kids, and stating that if I didn't provide the license plate and vehicle description information (if I was in a diff vehicle), that she wouldn't be able to let me see the kids. I felt the stress reaction for a few minutes, but began praising God, for this astonishing thing he does, where he warns me each time the devil is going to strike through her.

5. I got to the point, pretty quickly, where I was just quietly tolerating my mom's anxious behavior in the car. She cannot help herself, "driving and CONTROLLING from the backseat". I ignored it for hours and hours and finally, with only 50 miles left to go, she just started complaining again that I'm too close to other cars and that they are old, and I need to know that I'm scaring her and Bob to death. I decided in that moment to just pull over on the side of the road and let Bob, drive. I just couldn't hear it anymore, after being up since 4am and driving all day, I was done. My mother thinks it's all because I had coffee and I'm amped up. Coffee certainly was helping, but she was unaware of the real spiritual warfare that is going on.

6. When I stopped the car on the side of the highway, I looked down before getting out and the odometer read 666.7 miles. I almost didn't think anything of it because it was so obvious what was going on. I get in the passenger seat and check my email and ...BAM! There was another email from Jennifer's attorney. It was a copy of her tax return, that she had just filed days earlier. I couldn't believe it. She had led me to believe we would file together to save the money and we would get money back because of the children. But actually, she just deceived me and then turned around and filed separate, claiming all five children on the return for herself. Because of this, I will have to file late receiving a penalty, plus I will now owe \$1,400 tax rather than us both getting \$200 back if we had filed jointly! I felt major stress chemicals in my body and got quiet. This was once again a new low for Jennifer. I remained quiet until we picked up grandpa's

car, and I was driving it by myself. I began praising the Lord for all this suffering and telling him how much I loved him, and how I was so thankful that he warns me, but I also told him I was really hurt, and I cried. This was very hurtful for her to continue to hurt me like this. I pray the Lord sets her free from the shackles that the devil has on her because he has her BIGTIME.

I'm tired from the long day of driving, but this relentless persecution is doing so much for me spiritually. Even though it hurts like heck for a few minutes, or even longer...it makes me feel so joyful about the Lord, to know that He continues to refine me and work on me.

I believe any persecution I receive from others, from this day forward, will be water on a duck's back, compared to what Jennifer continues to dish out on me. She is my Goliath, but I'll let the Lord put the rock in her forehead, *not* me. I'm just going to keep enduring, and keep trusting, and keep learning, and keep being obedient. I know the Lord will deliver me.

On another note, I realized yesterday that I am seeing attack ALL the way around. I remember reading the scripture, where David talks about losing his friends and now my best friend has also completely turned against me and has been down right offensive, never returning my calls and only sending me an email with an accounting of the fact that I still owe him \$1200, even after all that I did for him. He is tangled in bondage and unforgiveness and I suspect he is still struggling with his porn addiction, which causes him shame. Then I noticed that Johnny (my blood father) isn't calling me anymore, and then when I left him a message last week, he never called me back.

Let me fill in some blanks about my blood father, in this part of the story. Several months earlier, I was driving down Weatherly road in SE Huntsville, when I saw a truck that looked just like my blood father's old Toyota pick up truck. As I got closer, I realized it was him. I couldn't believe it. I had not seen my him in 17 years, and now here I was driving beside him down the road. I followed him for a few miles, trying to decide what to do, and why I was wanting to do it. I had no need for him to be my father anymore, and he had totally rejected me back when I was 21, but I knew this couldn't just be some coincidence, that God didn't have a reason for.

I pulled up next to him at a light and rolled down my window, saying, "*Don't panic...I don't want anything from you...I just wanted to say hello.*" He was shocked, yelling out, "*what in the F are you doing in town?*" I had expected he might just ignore me, or keep on driving, but he asked me if I wanted to pull off the road and say hello just across the highway. I got out and gave him a hug and I could tell he was genuinely excited to see me. He invited me to his apartment just up the road, where we talked for five hours straight. It was wonderful. He was very much a heathen, but he hadn't drunk any alcohol in 10 years, and said his life was the best it had been in a long while. He said he was sorry for all the years we missed, but that he was in no position to be a dad, and wouldn't have been a good influence on my life for many of those years. He said, "*Well, at least we have time from this point forward.*" He looked good and sounded very sincere and excited to have this opportunity to have a relationship with me. I showed him all the pics of his grandchildren and he was blown away.

He really struggled to understand my faith in Christ and my disdain for my past sins and my life of business success, which he said he was so proud of me for. He kept saying, "*I'm not where you are at little Mike...I don't have what you have, but my life is truly blessed right now.*" Naturally, he thinks blessed is when the circumstances in your life are comfortable and plentiful, which may have absolutely nothing to do with a truly blessed life. This is the thinking of a heathen. He had a girlfriend and was sleeping with her and I could tell that he felt conviction and pressure to begin thinking about righteousness and God, now that I was around.

Then, during this week in October of 2011, he had sort of disappeared and wasn't returning my calls. That added to the sense of discouragement I had already been feeling with all the other attacks I listed in this particular journal entry.

I continued writing in that entry... All of this spiritual attack, since I've started proclaiming Jesus and teaching Biblical truth, so boldly, is just incredible and it's almost flattering. It confirms that I'm headed in the right direction and being obedient to Christ.

1. Ex-Girlfriend: Disappeared and no longer took any of my calls even as a friend.
2. Best friend in Florida: Avoiding me and not talking to me now for months.
3. Blood father - Not calling me back after a promising reunion.

Psalm 88:8 You have taken from me my closest friends and have made me repulsive to them. I am confined and cannot escape;

Psalm 38:11 My friends and companions avoid me because of my wounds; my neighbors stay far away.

October 30th, 2011

The last two weeks have been so indescribable and so filled with highs and lows that I almost can't process all of it. I know I must journal it, though. In addition to losing relationships with my best friend and my blood father, the following things have also happened.

I got to see the children four times, while in FL, and we had a blast! It was so grace filled and each visit, the Spirit reminded me, *"I told you, you could trust me, with them."* They are doing so great, despite how hard the divorce has been. I'm so thankful, I can't put it into words.

Then, my good friend Todd B. invites me to go to this unnamed secretive Christian men's event. He said he believed it was time for me to go to this, and I trusted him enough to go without having any idea what it was about, or why I was even going. On the way to Todd's house, where I will leave my car for the weekend, I see 111, two times, back to back, which is a reference to that verse in Mark 1:11, which says *"You are my son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."* I was so moved to see this again...I gave thanks to the Lord, told Him I loved Him too, and just smiled for several miles. I knew I was doing the right thing.

It's now nighttime and we are all on the bus, headed to some secret camp deep in the middle of the woods and we still have no idea what is there waiting for us, or what will be required of us. It was dark in the back of the bus, but I recognized the bus driver and I asked the guys sitting around me if anyone knows what his name is. Amazingly, it turns out to be Ted Smith, the former owner of Children's Corner, where I went to childcare as a young child in Cape Canaveral, FL. I got off the bus, where he was greeting us all and I started to sing, *"Everywhere we go, people want to know, who we are, what we're doing, where we're going..."*, and he was like, *"OH my Gosh!"* This was one of the songs he would have all of us children sing during our field trips at his Summer camp. I told him my name, and he started flipping out. I said Ted, I learned how to tie my shoes at your childcare center, and I got my first real kiss on your bus. He laughed, and we just hugged in total amazement that we had both become followers of Christ and were seeing each other after more than thirty years.

At this point, I knew I needed to pay attention to why I was there, and that this was also NO coincidence. At dinner that night. My friend Todd revealed to me that he had sent out 20 invitations for this event, and I was the only one who accepted. He couldn't believe it.

The first two nights and days are just normal. Nothing big has happened, other than some cool fellowship and some pretty good teaching, but none that was truly revelatory because I had already been really getting after God's word and truth. So, I kept wondering WHY in the world did the Lord want me to come to this men's only event out in the middle of nowhere?

On Saturday night, all 100 of us men were at dinner in the eating area, when suddenly the doors open and all these women, start pouring into the eating area, out of nowhere. They just keep coming and coming, all while singing. Now there is about 200+ people packed into this lodge eating area. The women all surrounded us and began serenading us men, with worship songs to the Lord. I knew we were all out in the middle of nowhere, and I can't believe these women have showed up to do this. They made a chain around the entire perimeter of the eating area and just kept singing to us. About the second song into it, I felt a lump growing in my throat, as the emotion was building. Then, in what seemed like a flash, I began to grieve that I had no wife in this group of women, singing over me. I longed to be sung over and cherished, by her, like these men, were being sung to by their wives. There are women standing all around, and I'm sitting with 100 men, and I could feel the tears start to stream down my face, which I could no longer hold back. I had my hat on, and I made a fist and tried to hide the rest of my face, so I didn't distract anyone. I thought if I could just hide it, it would go away, and I would be ok, in just a moment. It didn't go away but instead, I got more and more sad as I looked around the room. I just began grieving so much that Jennifer never felt this way about me, and that instead she had thrown me away like a piece of trash. The tears began getting stronger and my face was covered, while my body began to writhe in pain and shake in emotion. A few guys around me started to notice I wasn't doing well, so I decided I needed to get up and leave. The women were blocking the door and I knew it would make a scene, but it was going to be even worse if I stayed. I jumped up and bolted for the door in front of two hundred people, where I had to break through the chain of ladies to get out.

As soon, as I got outside, I started crying harder and harder. It was completely pitch-black outside, and I could barely see how to get back to the classroom area, about 30 yards away, so I headed that way as the crying got louder and stronger. I could hear that someone was now following, right behind me, not saying a word, and not touching me. I knew what was coming...this was going to be painful and deep and ugly and there was no controlling it, much like when you have to vomit. I made it to a bench on the porch of the classroom area, and as soon as my butt hit the bench, it came out of me. I cried so hard and wailed so loud that it felt like I was going to suffocate. I was bent in half, and I couldn't breathe or see, I was just wailing and wailing to the point where I would gag. It was like I was screaming and crying all at the same time.

The person who had followed me out, was my friend Todd, and he was sitting on the bench beside me, just rubbing and massaging my back, not saying a word. He was just letting me grieve, and get it all out. I was wailing so loud that a large dog came from the other side of the camp and came right up to me, and with the saddest look on his face, like, "*Ahhh,,what's wrong mister.*" It was so sweet. I felt like the Lord sent that dog to show me he cared...it was incredible. That dog could tell that I was in deep pain, and he just looked at me with his big sad and empathetic eyes, trying to comfort me. This dog didn't even know me, and he was trying to comfort me...it was unbelievable!

I began yelling, "*She threw me away, she threw me away, she has been so evil to me, and said so many hurtful things to me.*" I was lamenting the loss of my wife, and I was grieving the fact that she had thrown me away and done so many hurtful things to me. I was so broken hearted for me and for her. I wanted her back. I wanted her to get help, and get set free from the anger and the bondage that the devil has her in. Her heart is so hard, and she had been so unbelievably mean to me, but all I could feel, was love and sadness

for her. It was just incredible! Even after all the outrageous and hateful things she has done to me, the feelings of hurt were now gone, and I felt extreme love and compassion for her. I wanted her back. I wanted reconciliation, with the wife of my youth.

Todd just kept rubbing on me and then pastor Jimmy showed up. Bless his heart, like most others, he is clueless about this kind of stuff. He was trying so hard to encourage me and tell me his stories, etc. and all that I needed was to be left alone, so I could grieve the loss of my wife. I had compassion on him too, so I just let him talk.

Todd said I wailed for at least 20 minutes. It was the hardest I have ever cried in my life. I didn't realize it yet, but it was a "death" cry where God was allowing me to fully grieve and to be fully released in my soul from my ex-wife. Once I was back in class for the evening session, I stayed so sad. Many of the brothers, just came up and hugged me and held me, while I continued to cry. It was the most beautiful thing ever. My new brothers were hurting because I was hurting. This was Christlike!

I couldn't do much during that evening's session. I just kept weeping and I could feel that the sadness, was still right there. That night, in our sleeping area, Bob, who slept in the bed, next to mine, started asking me a bit about what happened. I told him briefly about my story, the abortion, and then my wife losing it, leaving me and slandering and hurting me so much, and how now I was missing her and wishing she would get healed.

After about 10 minutes, I heard this voice, coming from the other side of the room, where it was dark. It was Glen, the "quiet guy", who I had tried to make eye contact with, several times during the days, but never did. He said, "*Mike...we need to talk man...I'm going through the exact same thing as you.*" I got up off my bunk and went over to Glen and introduced myself and said, "*Let's definitely talk in the morning man.*" I could see heavy sadness on Glen's face and I could tell he was really hurting badly too.

I went back to my bunk, to finish talking with Bob and then Rick came over to join in. The conversation actually ramped up, right when we are all supposed to be going to bed. The guy in charge of our room, had already turned the lights out, but me, Bob and Rick were still talking about God and our lives. About that time, I said, "*Glen, are you still awake?*" He said yeah. I said, "*Come over here, and talk with us.*". He got up and came over and the four of us sat on two bunks facing each other, in the dark, trying to keep it down. After about 15 minutes of sharing our respective stories, two other guys, got out of their beds and came over and sat on the cold concrete, just to hear us talk and join in. Now, 6 of the 10 guys in our room, were all huddled together, talking and encouraging one another. We each had struggles we were going through and so I felt like we should all pray. I asked the other two brothers, what they needed prayer for and then we all started to just pray. It was beautiful. A band of broken brothers, who were complete strangers just days earlier, now being transparent and open with one another and loving on and praying for one another. The next day, one of the other guys in our room, said it was the highlight of his 3-day journey, just hearing us all praying together that night.

On Sunday, the last day, we had some extra time during chapel, to share stories of what God has been doing in our lives, so a few of us, shared some stories. I felt led to share the story of me going into the projects and being rejected. As I was sharing it and getting close to where I shared the lesson that the Lord had taught me from it, many of the men began to cry and were so moved by the story. At the end of my story, I thanked the men and told them that this had been a life changing weekend, and that I was so thankful for all of them and that I loved them. At this point, someone yelled out "group hug" and they all surrounded me and hugged me like crazy. It was just so beautiful and so amazing...words cannot describe the feeling of love and brotherhood. I felt so special and so loved in that moment—just amazing!

That same day, Glen admitted to me that he now knew the devil had been putting negative thoughts into his head about me the whole weekend and basically telling him, “*avoid that guy...he is not real.*” Satan knew that Glen and I were going to keep in touch and that God was going to use me to really encourage him not to fight in his divorce, but to give the battle to God and trust Him alone!

This is also the weekend that I heard one of the most remarkable salvation stories I had ever heard and where I met one of my dearest brothers in Christ, still to this day, Steve Benton. When Steve shared his story of being such an evil person his whole life, and then how at the age of 61, God allowed Him to be baptized in a freak gasoline fire, in his backyard that left him in the hospital for 51 days, I was truly gripped!

Soon, Steve and I both realized that the Lord put us together, so that I could tell his story on video, which is available on YouTube under the title, “If God Can Forgive Me, He can forgive Anybody!!” Here is the link to Steve’s riveting story. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yPHpER0TqUI>

The next day was Monday, and I was to pick the kids up for a quick visit. As I drove to the meeting place, I was day dreaming about being reconciled to Jennifer. I saw myself going up to her car and getting her out and just holding her, telling her I loved her and forgave her. When I realized I was doing this, I went into prayer and asked the Lord to quickly tell me what was going on, and if I should be thinking like this or not. Was this of him, or of me?

My mind raced back and forth on this, while I was sitting in the parking lot waiting. I just kept praying and nervously asking the Lord, what should I do. She never even looks at me, when she drops off the kids, so what am I thinking? I was flooded with feelings of love and forgiveness for her, and I couldn’t feel the slightest sense of anger, regardless of all that she has done to me over the last 16 months. When she drops off the kids, she never even looks at me, and I know that door is closed by God forever, but I am free to love her as my enemy now, with no bitterness whatsoever. Thank you, Jesus!

As incredible as that weekend had been, the devil was also there to throw in his two cents of distraction and temptation too. The main pastor who led the event sat next to me at lunch on Sunday. At one point he speaks up and says, “*Hear this from the Lord Michael, the day is coming where you are going to be back in business, and you are going to make a lot of money because now you will use it for his purposes, not yours. Michael, the Lord has given you the gift of making money and monetizing things, and not all people have that gift.*”

I resisted what he said in my spirit, and it sounded like a false prophecy to me, designed to tempt me back to the very thing the Lord had pulled me out of. Indeed, I found myself thinking again of my humble circumstances, and how nice it would be to climb out of the ditch. Then, not even two weeks later, my friend John Moore invited me to fly down in the helicopter to Fort Lauderdale with him and two other men, who were multi-millionaires, to the Fort Lauderdale Boat Show. One of the guys had just sold his healthcare company for several hundred million dollars and was going down to buy a \$7,000,000 yacht.

There is perhaps no place on earth that screams wealth and enticement like the Fort Lauderdale Boat show. You see things there that you will not see anywhere else, all at one place. You are surrounded by the richest people in the world, 100’+ yachts all over the place, the most expensive automobiles and toys made, and rich beautiful people all over the place. There is a spirit of enticement all over it, and I could feel it. Once we landed, I followed my friend John and the two other guys through the marina, just praying the whole way, asking God to protect my heart and to keep me from being enticed back into the love of money. This was the very highest level of the life I had chosen to flee from. What enticement!

Chapter 26

A Helicopter Ride, A Champion Surfer, A Dating Website, & an Exorcism

Oddly enough, I'm able to look back and see that surviving the temptations of the mammon god at the Fort Lauderdale boat show took away most of the fear I had of being tempted back into a life of pursuing pleasure and material prosperity. I felt like I was able to let me guard down a bit. On the flight home, we dropped off the two guys at the Tampa International airport and then John and I flew back to Orlando.

At the time, I knew a professional supercross racer named Matt Boni, who owned a very secret and very coveted piece of property way out East of Orlando. The property had two large race tracks, a nice supercross track and a large outdoor, 2-mile motocross track, and it had passed through the hands of several of the world's best racers, including Grant Langston of South Africa, and Ryan Villopotto of Team Kawasaki, a multi-time champion. It has been a well-kept secret training location for some of the world's best riders to come train in Florida in the winter.

The current owner was a racer named Matt Boni, who my former best friend and I had met through one of his other friends and racers. Matt grew up Christian and was such a humble and down to earth guy, and he had been so kind to let Tyler and I come to his private property a few times and watch him ride. He even sat down and did an interview with me for my old Kickstart My Day videos. My best friend at the time took the neat picture below of Matt jumping his dirt bike high over Tyler and I's heads at a large jump on his supercross track.



I knew he was retiring from racing due to injuries and he was selling his property and I thought of an idea to help him, since he had been so kind to us during our visits. I had this idea to fly over it in the helicopter and shoot some nice aerial video, which he could use to show potential buyers.

We were going to be passing right by his property on the way back to Orlando, so John thought it was a neat idea and flew me all around the property and I got some great footage. This was long before the age of drones. Then, on the rest of the flight home, I started telling John how neat of a business idea it would be if he and I flew over high-end properties and made aerial real estate videos. He knew how to fly the helicopter and I knew how to make good videos. We both thought it was a good idea, so I contacted my dear sister Carol Ann Dykes to see who she knew that might be a good connection to get me started. It turns out she knew someone in charge out at Isleworth, the wealthiest neighborhood in Central Florida and she agreed to make the connection for me. I was really excited.

The next day, I started thinking to myself, maybe that pastor's word to me really was from God and that I just couldn't hear it because I was afraid of getting sucked back into the money pit. I sent him an email letting him know my new thoughts about this.

October 31st, 2011

My grandpa Carl passed away, on Halloween of all days. My mother doesn't want to talk about it, but she claims that when he died, one side of his face contorted, and it just looked like something evil had taken place to her. She asked the nurse, who was not a follower of Christ, what she thinks happens when people die like this, and the nurse said that sometimes it looks a battle is going on for the soul of the person, between good and evil.

Psalm 49:16-20 Do not be overawed when a man grows rich, when the splendor of his house increases; for he will take nothing with him when he dies, his splendor will not descend with him. Though while he lived, he counted himself blessed—and men praise you when you prosper—he will join the generation of his fathers, who will never see the light of life. A man who has riches without understanding is like the beasts that perish.

November 3rd, 2011

I received an email from Ken Gray this morning, one of my best friends from Cocoa Beach high school. He told me that our old school mate, Kelly Slater, has just won his 11th world championship surfing title. That is just unbelievable.

Let me break from this journal entry and fill in a little bit of the back story here. Oh, how badly I wanted to be Kelly Slater when we were in high school. There was no teenager on the planet, cooler than he was. The guy was super handsome, the girls loved him, he was absolutely amazing at surfing, he was laid back, and to top it all off, he was an honors student. He was everything I wasn't but wanted to be when I was a teenager. Since I couldn't be him, I would have gladly settled just to be around him.

Kelly and I first became connected in the most unlikely of ways; he almost beat me up one day. I was a class clown, and I had been teasing a girl in class named Krista G. I don't remember what I said to her, but Kelly misinterpreted what I said, thinking I had made a really harsh comment towards her. Krista and Kelly were both good friends and he was looking out for her, a noble thing to do. When class was over, and we got just outside the door, he came right up and pushed me up against the wall and put his hand forcefully around my throat. I was not a fighter, so I didn't resist Kelly back. Naturally, I was shocked this was

happening, and everyone gathered around to see what was going to happen, but Kelly's older brother, Sean Slater, pushed through the gathered crowd and pulled Kelly off me. I always respected Sean for that move.

After Kelly realized I had just been playing around and that he had made a mistake, he apologized and started being nice to me, even inviting me to his house one day, just he and I. I remember walking upstairs in their condo and seeing a wall full of custom-made Matt Kechele surfboards in their room, and a huge crate box full of Sundeck clothing and surf wear, which were he and Sean's primary sponsors at the time. To me, it was like seeing a room full of treasure. The feelings in my heart were nothing short of lust, towards his lifestyle. He showed me all around his house, even showing me his father's little home sized distillery where he made his own alcohol. I had hoped this was the beginning of a closer friendship and that I would soon be on Kelly's inside circle, but it wasn't going to happen.

It seems silly, and it could have been something totally different, but as best as I can remember, Kelly lost the desire to be my friends, shortly after I started beating him in arm wrestling...Ha! Kelly can take pride for being the world's greatest surfer ever to live, but I can take pride that I was able to, at one time, beat the greatest surfer that ever lived in arm wrestling. After lunch, several of us would arm wrestle on a chair in the gym, and the winner would get the other's little Debbie snack cake. Kelly was fiercely competitive and remained that way—you don't win 11 world championships settling for second place. I remember Kelly was seriously not happy at all, when I beat him more than once and he had to give up his Nutty Bars to me.

I left Cocoa Beach Highschool half way through the 10th grade, and only saw Kelly one time, years later at a local surf contest at the Cocoa Beach Pier, where I introduced him to Jennifer. Over the years I would occasionally see surfing on TV, or see some internet news and wonder how Kelly was doing. Each time I checked up to see what his life was looking like, I would have these feelings of disappointment that I missed out on having a relationship with that guy. I did lose some respect for him during the season of his life where he was on the TV show Baywatch and when I heard he was dating Pamela Anderson, but within a few years he was back to normal and focusing on his surfing career full-time.

As the years passed, I would occasionally have dreams that Kelly and I ran into each other and he recognized me, or that he called me and invited me to come out to his house to go surfing in Hawaii, etc. The dreams were always so real and so vivid, like they really happened, and I would wake up so excited and yet so disappointed. The consistency of these dreams over the years was quite surprising. Kelly had made a strong impression on me.

The only other person I ever had recurring dreams about reunions like this, was my Grandpa Mac, who before I became a teenager, had abandoned his entire family, including me. He and I had such an incredible relationship when I was a young child that my mother and others described it as magical.

Right after leaving Cocoa Beach high school, I moved to Winter Park, FL with my mom and step-father. We all walked into a Taco Bell one day and there stood my Grandpa Mac with a younger woman. I ran up to see him and was so excited to have found him and he acted like he didn't even know me. I was devastated. Eventually, he changed his identity and moved to another state, so no one could find him. For years I had dreams where I missed him so much and was looking for him and then several where we were reconciled. My subconscious mind was trying to make meaning out of this tragedy and to find pain relief while I slept.

Before I knew and loved Jesus Christ, I was so impacted by earthly relationships. I seemed to almost live or die by them, in a sense. It would have been very easy for me to give my hero worship to someone like Kelly Slater because I wanted so badly to be loved and accepted, to feel valued, after being abandoned by so many family members. Sadly, after Kelly Slater, I can see a lengthy list of famous athletes or well-known business leaders that I have met, and then wanted very much to be on their inside circle. I was

always trying to get close to people who were loved and appreciated, so that I too would be. I lusted after the praise of men, made of dust, to find my self-worth, just one more reason why I am the chief of all fools.

However, as I look back, I can more importantly see how my loving heavenly Father closed all these doors before this fool. Every single famous friend, or every single mentor, or father type relationship I went after, God always closed that door, even Christian ones. I was so eager to learn, so eager to be mentored, that Father knew He had to protect me from the influence of men, many who would have led me astray or used me for their own selfish benefit. The terrible truth is that I wanted to be friends with well-loved people like Kelly Slater for purely selfish reasons, to make me feel like I was valued, not because I wanted to be a true selfless and valuable friend to them. God knew I would never be able to be that to others, until I found my true love and acceptance, my value, in being a beloved son of God, through Jesus Christ alone!

Now back to my journal entry from November 3rd, 2011 about hearing the news of Kelly's latest title win...

I see this kind of human potential and performance and glory, and I think to myself. *"Why am I not giving myself to something with that much focus and dedication?"* I feel guilty, as if I'm not living up to my full potential when I see guys like Kelly Slater and Ricky Carmichael become such superior champions.

I'm always quick to dismiss their achievements as "self-glorifying" and meaningless, but that is obvious, since they are not born-again followers of Jesus Christ. Of course, they are self-seeking and desire glory for themselves, they don't know anything different. I now do.

So, I'm forced to ask myself. Am I living with that much focus and dedication to anything? Am I serving and focusing on God, like Kelly Slater is focused on surfing? Could I ever become a "Champion Christian?" Does my Christian work ethic warrant championship results?

1 Corinthians 9:24 – Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.

November 5th, 2011: I'm feeling wounded and empty about the loss of my wife and the grieving thing I did at that men's event. Since my girlfriend is no longer in my life, I have had nothing else to "numb" me from feeling the pain of this loss. I have been really disappointed in myself the last week, because I have felt so driven by my needs. I have had several days, where I'm sitting at the Starbucks and every attractive woman that walks in, I look at her, and see a wedding ring and say, *"shucks...she's married."* I have been in "hyper drive" and noticing every single attractive woman, everywhere I go. I even had a dream, that a beautiful woman was attracted and interested in me.

I had a situation a few days ago, where I almost wanted to go up to one woman and give her my business card and say, *"What if we were supposed to meet and we didn't?"* (How ridiculous is that?). I have been very aware of how crazy this is, and how dangerous it is, to be in this place and I have been extremely concerned because the Lord hasn't felt as close to me as normal. I have prayed and asked the Lord for his grace and I have asked Larry to pray for me. I even confessed it to Steve Benton my new brother from the men's event, and he said, just like Larry had said, that I need to just let the Lord be my lover for right now. Admittedly, no one wants to hear that when they are needy, but I know in my spirit that it's the truth. I need to give myself time to heal at a time when I least want to be alone. It's very difficult!

By far, the worst feeling the past few weeks, has been the disconnectedness I have felt in my spirit, from the Lord. I went to this incredibly spiritual, life changing event and coming off it, it has felt like I've been in a fog. I know this must be because of all that grieving that happened on Saturday night.

I noticed two days ago that my hyper awareness of attractive woman, seemed to be calming down and I was so thankful for God's grace. I know the helicopter trip to the Fort Lauderdale Boat Show was a prosperity test for me, and maybe this past week, has been a "physical and emotional needs" test. I'm feeling perhaps like Jesus in the desert for 40 days with Satan the tempter saying, *"want some of this Jesus...how about that... surely you would enjoy having this."*

The sensitivity started to fade, when God blessed me on Wednesday with two new video jobs and a sense of security for some of my future income. I was so blessed, I just kept saying, *"Thank you Lord, Thank you Lord"*. I had such a smile on my face, because he has been so faithful to provide for me and in turn, the kids. Plus, Carol Ann, has agreed to introduce me to the president of Isleworth for my "aerial" real estate video idea. I couldn't have felt more blessed by the end of that day.

Yesterday the Lord finally spoke to me again and I completely broke. I was just finishing up editing my video entitled "Could one of these spiritual roadblocks be in your way?" I had been having doubts again about doing all this work and putting these messages out there. I watched the video, one last time to preview it and as I stood up, I pressed my phone on and there it was, 1:11pm. I screen captured it.

I instantly dropped to my knees and fell before the Lord. I put my face on the ground and started crying and just saying, *"thank you, thank you, thank you Lord."* I got up and tried to walk away and it just kept hitting me...I had been so desperate for the Lord's touch, and here He is again with the most powerful message I could ever hear. I have seen 111 about 10 times in the last 2 weeks. Interestingly, it has mostly appeared right after I finished doing something righteous, or after I have experienced doubt about my spiritual work. For instance, I saw it right after I had that long prayer time in the car and had felt such love and forgiveness for Jennifer that I knew I could go up and hug her. I saw it twice on the way to Todd's house to go in faith to the men's event. I saw it again when I met with Glen W. to encourage him to trust God in his divorce. I saw it, while writing some notes about things I was going to share with people about God, while sitting up at the lake on Green Mountain.

It has been the hardest word from God for me to believe, and yet it's the one I most desperately needed to hear. When the Holy Spirit first showed me, it was Mark 1:11, I said, *"Oh my goodness Lord, I need to know this is you, and not just me."* I asked the Lord to confirm it and sure enough, just a few hours later, there it was. This truly wiped me out. Here He is being so personal with me and again, telling me, *"I love you son, and I'm proud of you."*

John 17:23 – "May...the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

Once I gained my composure, I told the Lord that He was all that I needed and that I was so sorry for seeking what I was missing, once again, from something outside of Him. I walked into the bathroom, with a sense of calm, and I felt like the Holy Spirit was reminding me that I will one day have a wife that will love me and that I can love, again, *just not yet*. There are still some things to get in order. Right now, I need to focus on keeping my eyes on Him and building my business and financial stability, back up, so that I can get moved back down by the children.



On another note, I called Johnny again last night and he answered this time. He said he was just laying low because he knew I had a lot going on. I suspect he is still a bit fragile and can't handle the drama. Nonetheless, he sounded upbeat and I told him let's get together for dinner and he agreed. I'll see if he calls.



Friday November 11th, 2011 11/11/11 - WOW!

I got the idea a few days ago that I would really like to meet someone of the opposite sex for at least at friendship. I decided to try ChristianMingle.com. I signed up for the free version, two nights ago.

As soon as I finished my profile, I did a search and the top match was a very attractive girl named Jill. She was a 100% profile match for me. I started becoming anxious and didn't yet feel ready to approach anyone yet, but the next day, she sent me a message. We decided to talk on the phone before meeting and the phone call went well. She was almost a little too silly or funny at first, but I suspect it was because of her nerves because when we got into talking about deep stuff, she was right there with me. The conversation was great, and I was totally excited to hear what sounds like a deep love and knowledge of the Lord.

She pointed out several things that she saw in my story video that were red flags to her. She thought I had left my children, because I had moved to Huntsville, and then she saw the first part of my story video with all the business and money talk and she was like, *"No way...not into that...that's just like my ex...driven and willing to walk right over people to get their own agenda accomplished."* She said as she got to the part of video where, I began talking about my hidden pride that she instantly calmed down and said, *"Ok, here we go."* I'm glad that she was a little weary because it shows discretion on her part. I'm feeling very excited but very peaceful. I want to enjoy the journey.

This morning, I woke up and realized how tough I have been on myself about this whole "desiring a companion or wife thing." I finally realized that it's completely ok for me to have this deep desire to have love and intimacy with a woman. That doesn't mean that God's not meeting all my needs or that I'm trying to find something outside of Him to make me happy. God himself, when he made Adam, said "It is NOT good for him to be alone." I was created this way and God wired me the way I am. I am no longer going to allow myself to feel guilty about desiring another relationship with a woman. I have grieved the loss of Jennifer and the Lord has confirmed that it is over and dead.

Today was our first day to meet at Panera Bread for lunch, and on the way, she texted me to check out the date, 11/11/11. I arrived at Panera first and to my absolute amazement, when she sat down in the chair across from me, the time changed to 11:11am on my phone. I was so amazed that I took a screen capture of my screen at that very moment. Here was our first date on 11/11/11 at 11:11am. This was NO coincidence, but I had no idea what it meant!

We talked for four hours that first meeting and nothing felt spectacular. She was quite guarded, and the conversation felt more matter of fact. The next day, she assured me that she was interested in me, but she spent the next three hours grilling me about almost everything in my life, and it got to the point where I felt she was asking all these things out of fear. I realized this was probably not the relationship for me and the next day, before leaving for Florida, I sent her a nice email telling her that I felt she was not emotionally available at this time, and that I thought it was best to move on. After reading it, she called me while I was driving to Florida and after fiercely defending herself and talking for two hours, I agreed to give the relationship a try.

November 18th, 2011

Deliverance from Demons Meeting in Lakeland, FL with my friend Todd B.

There is still a small part of me that CANNOT believe what I witnessed with my own eyes last night, even though I believed in it, before I saw it. Todd had been inviting me for a few months to attend a deliverance ministry meeting with him, in Lakeland, where he goes and ministers each Thursday night. Todd has personally studied under Bob Larson, who is considered the world's foremost authority on the Occult, Inner Healing and Demon Possession and Oppression.

So last night, a few of us rode together with Todd to this event. I have seen the Lord do some wonderful supernatural things in my own life, like warning me of spiritual attack, or encouraging me with all these #'s that I see, but I've never seen anything like this.

We showed up at this nice church in Lakeland and I bet there were about 250 people there. We sing a few worship songs and I can feel the spirit of God, in a big way. I was moved by the Spirit in that room...it was powerful and loving. I had tremendous peace, even though I know I was about to walk into the unknown.

After worship, Bob began to explain about curses and blessings and he reads from Deuteronomy 28. He states very emphatically, that this is a very easy question, "Do you choose God's blessings for your life, or do you choose cursing?"

He explains, just like I had already been taught and concluded that curses are NOT something that God adds to your life or puts on your life, rather curses are simply what occur in a broken, dark world, when God removes His hand of protection and favor from your life. Right there, he had me.

He sees a lady sitting in the audience and he starts talking about how excited he is to see her again. He asks her to come on stage. She was a very tall, attractive, and well-kept lady. She looked very professional in her dress and her spirit seemed very peaceful and sweet. Her name was Bonnie. As she gets on stage, Todd looks over at me and says, "*You would not believe what happened to this lady, in March, when we were here.*" Todd said she looked more like a dirty prostitute, back then. She had been struggling with drugs for like 14 years and was falling apart. She had attended in March and Bob cast out several demons from her. It was apparently a huge battle, according to Todd. Now this lady was standing on the stage, happy, peaceful and filled with joy and love. She was incredibly thankful for the Lord using Bob to set her free. She had come back to help others that might be in the same situation.

He then asks all of us if we want to be set free from any curses we might be under and instead begin to receive God's blessings? We all say "Yes" very enthusiastically. He then begins to explain that he does this all over the world and America is the most difficult because we are so stubborn and hardly believe in the supernatural.

He tells a very compelling story that has us ALL hanging on the edge of our chair about a Rock band in Norway, called Mayhem. His grandparents were from Norway and since he is world famous for exorcism, a tv station in Norway found out that his grandparents came from Norway and they challenged Bob to a face to face meeting with the lead guy from this band, who is known to be the most Satanic band in the world. The tv station was doing a documentary and flew the guy from the band, all the way to the states, to see Bob.

By the time he was done telling the story, we were all just hanging on the edge of our seats and believed that this guy was the real deal and has had some crazy experiences. Throughout the evening, he placed all

the emphasis on the POWER OF CHRIST, not HIM. He said, I am just being obedient to the scriptures, doing what Jesus did, when he was here and using His power to set people free. I liked that.

He finishes the story and begins explaining that as he begins to renounce and rebuke the powers of Satan in the lives of the people in this room, and as he begins the process of walking us all through breaking any curses we are under, he explained that we will likely begin to see and hear some disturbing things. He explained that during this process, if anyone in here is demon possessed, we would all begin to see and hear “manifestations”. He said in eastern Europe, where Christ has been suppressed for hundreds of years, it’s not uncommon for 70% of the audience to begin twitching, screaming and rolling around on the floor.

He said, “Do not suppress what you feel coming up out of you, when I begin to do this.” He said it is possible for you to push it back down, out of embarrassment or fear but that the key is to let it bubble up the surface so that they can identify you and help you.

He then begins to ask us if we are ready and begins to name some of the things that open the door to demonic possession or curses. He talks about 2 min and he says the word “Witchcraft” and right at that very moment, a guy 3 rows in front of me and to my left...leans forward and lets out a loud moan, right in the middle of while Bob is talking. Several of us are startled and many people start looking over that way to see. I couldn’t believe it...just by saying the word, “Witchcraft” the guy started to manifest. As Bob went further into explanation, the guy started rocking back and forth and shaking and still moaning and stuff. Todd just leaned forward and with one of his big ole grins confirmed, “See...I told you so!”

The guy was young looking, in his late 20’s or early thirties and he didn’t look healthy...he was really lean, almost sickly looking and his back was kind of hunched. It turns out that this young guy was sitting right next to Bonnie, who had the testimonial of being delivered back in March. As he kept rocking and making little noises, Bonnie began to talk to him in his ear and rub on his back, trying to comfort him. It was actually the most Christlike thing I saw all night. She had no fear whatsoever to be next to him and just kept comforting and loving on him. She KNEW what he was going through. Bob was still just in the explanation part of his talk, he hadn’t begun praying against the spiritual forces or curses.

Then the time came. He grabbed his cross and said, “*Are you ready?*” We all said yes. He asked a team of people to join him up front and said, “*Be ready to follow me.*” He explained to us that when he is walking around the room, he wants all of us to look him directly in the eyes. He explained that this is how he can tell if someone has a demon, they will give him “that look”, as he calls it.

So, he began to ask us to repeat after him, out loud, and all at once. “*I renounce Satan and his power in my life... “I break all curses, I repent for the sins of my forefather’s, etc.*

I AM NOT KIDDING! Within 30 seconds of even starting this, a lady in the front row began to shake and lean back and forth and let out all kinds of moaning and noises. She even tilted her head back, like she was out of control. I had goose bumps and was starting to freak out a little. Bob just kept speaking and having all us repeat after him....It was a huge distraction to see and hear that, but he acted like it wasn’t even happening.

Then a girl in her 20’s two rows in front of me started manifesting a demon. Oddly enough, even though I was kind of scared to see this, I felt compassion on these people...they really looked like they were uncomfortable and struggling.

So, there was about 4 people in an audience of 200+ that were showing signs of actual demonic possession. He went to them one by one in the audience, with a team and began to confront the demons in them. 3 of them seemed to come out rather easy. I could see the demeanor of the young lady in front of me, completely change and relax, almost instantly, at one point during her exorcism. She had been on drugs for 14 years.

They moved these people to a special area, upfront to be further ministered to. Meanwhile there was a 50-year-old lady on the front row that STOPPED THE SHOW. She began to scream out loud and act really weird. Bob called his team over to her and this case was different. She was not set free, after only a few minutes. After Bob could see that this was a serious one, he had the team take her up on the stage, so we could all witness this.

I have never seen anything like this in my life. This lady was EAT UP with demons. Bob noticed and so did we, that she was doing weird things with her arms like she was stretching or something and that she was touching her fingers together over and over and very quickly...like a spasm. Bob immediately knew that this was an eastern religion demon and he asked her. ... "Do you do YOGA?" She said "Yes".. He asked her...do you meditate..."She said Yes" and he knew immediately what was going on. It was a struggle for her to answer the questions.

Bob asked Lindey to step aside so he could speak directly to the demons. At this, her entire face changed and looked like something out of the movies. Every question he asked was resisted so strongly that twice, we all thought her head was going to explode. Her face turned so red and painful...it was difficult to watch.

He began to ask the demons if they had a legal right to be there and how many generations they had been there. It took him more than 5 minutes to get an answer to the generation question. They kept resisting him and one time, she put her face right in his face and looked like she wanted to kill Bob...it was freaky. Then on another question, she started laughing violently and very evil like. It was just crazy to see...her body never stopped moving and several times she wanted to drop to the ground, but there were two guys holding her arms and holding her up. Bob has been injured many times during these deliverance sessions.

Finally he kept pressing in on the generational question..asking "How many generations?" He was being forceful and commanding them in Christ name to tell him. She was squirming and looked like her mouth had been glued shut and then she finally yelled....mmmmmmmm....ninnnnnnnnne. He then said "9 generations?" A few seconds later she exploded and yelled out ninnneeeteeeeeenn! This possession went back 19 generations...which means someone opened the door 19 generations ago for this to happen to her.

Bob began to use the names of Eastern Religion "gods" which are really just demons...one name was Sheva and he also used the name Jezebel and as soon as he said that name, she began to violently laugh.

The demons refused to come out of her so Bob would keep tormenting them with his cross and the Bible. He took his Bible and pushed it against her back and she let out a scream that almost broke our ear drums...it was FREAKKKKKYYY!

I was getting exhausted, watching this. It must have gone on for 30+ minutes by now. She looked like she was miserable and exhausted from all of this and every once in a while, she would come back and he would ask her questions. When he was talking to her and not the demons, her disposition was totally different...calm, relaxed, tired, hurting, etc.

I watched her struggle one time, so bad, that I began to cry. I felt such compassion and sadness for her. It was like all of a sudden the “circus act” didn’t seem like a circus act anymore and I realized that this was a woman who loved the Lord, who was gentle and who was being tormented...it was very sad. I felt the love of Christ in my heart for her.

Eventually it looks like there is a breakthrough, and she calms down and comes back to normal. However, as Bob is wrapping it up, I notice that she was STILL...doing her fingers together...It was just like the way people do, when they do yoga or meditate. I told the guys “She isn’t done yet.” I knew she wasn’t done.

Bob gave us all a break and said that when we come back, he will pray for us all and anyone needing special prayer can come up and pray with someone at the front.

On my way to the bathroom, I was walking down this long hallway and I saw this 16 or 17-year-old, very dark skinned Indian boy, standing against the wall and looking at me in a really weird way. He was moving his arms and just staring at me. I tried not to make eye contact and just kept walking.

When I came back out, he was still standing right there, staring at me and when I walked by, *“He began to act really weird, flinging his arms and looking right at me and he made some weird mumbling sound at me, like he wanted to talk to me, but I just kept going.”*

NOT EVEN 10 minutes later, we walk back into the sanctuary and that SAME kid was at the back of the room with a deliverance minister, shaking like crazy and manifesting demons. The man had his hands on the boy’s head and tight grip on his arms, while his two Indian parents watched. I said, *“Guys...that kid manifested a demon, when I walked by him near the restroom....I KNEW something wasn’t right.”*

It almost made me feel a little edified because I noticed that he didn’t twitch, until I got right beside him, where he was standing in the hallway. This happened both times I passed by, as if the demons in him, didn’t like the Holy Spirit in me....it was pretty neat. Not sure if that’s the case, but that kid stared me down for sure. I already have evidence that the devil does NOT like me, for sure!

So, after the break, Bob explained what we all saw and opened it up to questions from the audience. When the program ended, lots of people went up to meet with counselors for prayer...lots. As the Good Lord as my witness, while I am on the phone with Jill, I look up front, where there are easily 15 counselors praying with lots of people. Right in front of me, was that Indian family. The boy was sitting very calmly in the front row, not moving around anymore at all and now his parents were being ministered to. While I’m talking to Jill, the Indian lady...the mother starts to throw up, right in front of me. The counselors had a bucket and she just kept puking in this bucket...I was like, *“I can’t believe this kind of stuff happens.”*

My phone dies while I was talking to Jill, right after this was happening. So, I just sat there and I had seen the 50 year old lady sitting on the edge of the stage, all by herself, while I was on the phone. She looked very calm, but spacey and I felt like going and giving her a hug to show Christ’s love and express my sympathy to her. I then wondered... *“Is that even safe to do at this point?”*

She just kept sitting there and she had this glassy eyed look. The next thing I know, Bob comes over to talk with her by herself. Before long, she is back manifesting demons AGAIN....Bob gets another man to help him and I’m just sitting here watching this.

I'll admit, there was a part of me that had wondered, "*Could this all just be an elaborate show or act*", earlier when I saw her on stage. The SHOW was now over....no one was paying attention, and everyone was busy talking to other people. There was no one standing around or even paying attention to her.

So, I was sitting there, watching this lady manifest, sitting on the edge of the stage, just speaking to Bob. Bob was very gentle...not talking loud and she just started to move her body in all these like yoga positions and dance with her arms and sway her whole upper body...it was RIDICULOUS to watch this happen. She was clearly not in control of her own body. At one point, she reaches over and wipes her hand close to Bob's face and he leans back and puts up his Bible.

We had to leave, so I have no idea what finally happened to that lady. Jesus Christ and his disciples cast out all kinds of demons and saw much stranger things than this, but for some reason, it's so difficult for us to believe these kinds of things still occur. I believe in the FULL Gospel and I know that Jesus talked more about hell than he did heaven and I know that my Grandfather was probably really seeing demons, right before he died, like he said he was, but this stuff is *just so weird*.

Having said that, I left feeling so much joy, and zeal for the Lord. The name of the Lord Jesus Christ has SO MUCH POWER. I left feeling "Yaay God!" Our God is an awesome God, indeed. This was just an incredible experience.

My current thoughts on this experience.

I am not right on everything. I am not gifted in every way. I do not have all gifts of the Spirit. I do not possess all wisdom, and I am not free from all spiritual ignorances. However, I have learned and continue to learn quite a bit through my own spiritual experiences, and as the Lord has blessed me with increasing discernment, things I would like to share about what I currently believe about deliverance ministries.

I believe that demons are absolutely real and that demonic torment, and even in rare cases, demon possession still happens today. However, I do not believe in going to deliverance ministries as Christians who have been exposed to the Gospel and the Bible. If a man in India has never heard of the Lord Jesus Christ, or doesn't yet know of the power of God to deliver him from demons, yes God may use another believer or minister to cast out that devil. However, the majority of people that attend these conferences already believe the Lord can deliver them and they already know the Scriptures. Perhaps that is why they came to the event.

I believe in the simple teaching of the Bible, found in Joel 2:32 and Acts 2:21, that all who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, will be saved. They can be saved not just from eternal condemnation, but also from demonic torment or possession. I believe just as Andrew Murray taught, that not all of the demons in hell can stand up to the deepest self-abasement and humility which cries out to the Lord in power and desperation, "Have mercy on me God...deliver me."

We must have humility before God and cry out to Him in faith to deliver us. I believe a person can be delivered from demons right where they are, simply by crying out to the Lord Jesus Christ for mercy and obeying his words. There is no need to go to a deliverance ministry and see a show. You can have your own show right in the privacy of your own room and the devil can be cast out of you, by Christ's Spirit alone. The same God who can privately deliver you from anger, sin, unforgiveness, love of money, addictions, etc. can also privately deliver you from any evil spirits tormenting you or possessing.

In my humble opinion, many men like Bob Larson are indeed casting out demons in the name of Jesus Christ, but my discernment of him at that time, God only knows his current condition, is that he was a man who has turned his anointing into a road show and that he lacks that deep childlike humility that is necessary to gain eternal life (Matthew 18:3-4). He spoke words of humility, as many men do, but I later discerned the hidden pride.

I believe the worst devil we can be possessed by, is the one that we are all possessed by, *pride*. A man or woman can be freed from a demonic spirit and still go to hell (Matthew 12:45). A man who casts out devils from others can still go to hell (Matthew 7:21-23). A man who has been freed from the devil of pride in his own heart, is a man worthy of eternity in heaven with Christ forever (Matthew 18:3-4)

Jesus did not say in Matthew 12:26, that “Satan cannot drive out Satan”, but rather “IF Satan drives out Satan”. I believe that Satan can, and often does cast out demons, and I agree again with brother Murray who said, “*When Satan casts out Satan, it is only to come back in a worse way.*”

Matthew 12:43 – “When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, ‘I will return to the house I left.’ When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first.”

The most difficult demon in the Scriptures to drive out was driven out by Jesus alone (Mark 9:29). Not even the disciples could drive it out. Jesus is alive, and Jesus can be called on right now, by anyone who needs Him. When Jesus walked around casting out demons, it was to prove that He had the power to do so. When the apostles did the same, it was to again prove to others who had not heard that there is a Gospel and a power in the name of Jesus Christ. I have personally experienced demonic torment, and I have seen what happens when one calls upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. I have never needed to go to a deliverance minister to get demons off my back. Instead I called on the deliverance minister of ALL deliverance ministers, the Lord Jesus Christ.

If a person thinks they are possessed, or under severe torment, they should crawl to Jesus in the deepest of humility and need, desperately crying out to Him for deliverance, UNTIL he finally delivers them. Jesus Christ can deliver a humble needy person right where they are at, if they are willing to obey Him. Example: You cannot withhold forgiveness from someone and then ask to be delivered from demons. Jesus said in Matthew 18 that people will be tormented by the torturers (devils) for not forgiving their brother from their heart. Your calling upon the Lord must be done with the willingness to learn and obey His words. If so, there is absolutely no need for a deliverance ministry or conference, where demon possession is made out to be a circus act, at the humiliation of others, and the exalting of the deliverance minister. Plus, if you call on the name of the Lord, there is no chance you will have hands laid on you by an agent of Satan who may be masquerading as an angel of light, who leaves you in a condition far worse than you were before.

For the rest of us, we should all be calling upon the Lord Jesus Christ to deliver us from the most dangerous and difficult to cast out of all devils, pride.

Acts 2:21 – “Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Chapter 27

When God Scared the SIN Right Out of Me

In this chapter I am going to divert away from the chronological journal entries and just explain a few major points and Biblical principles about my relationship with a woman, I'll call Jill, who I started dating through ChristianMingle.com on 11/11/11. This is the part of my story, where I came under Satan's most clever attempts at getting me to compromise and shrink back from a life of ever-increasing obedience and holiness. The devil was exploiting perhaps my greatest weakness, the opposite sex, in order to stop the increasing *saltiness* which God was working into my life, through compromise.

Matthew 5:13 - "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men."

Although this wouldn't be the last time he attacked me in this area of my weakness, I believe this was Satan's most clever and subtle attempt at robbing God of the glory He desired to receive through my life in ministry one day. I wasn't truly aware of the high stakes at that point, and I didn't fully perceive the sinister and deliberate spiritual war that was against me at this time. I also did not yet believe that I could lose my future inheritance of salvation, still believing that nothing could separate me from the Love of God in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:38-39). I had no idea how easily I could be tempted to separate my own self from his love, by wandering away from the true faith through compromise!

1 Timothy 6:20 - "Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith."

The Bible says in John 10:10 that the thief comes only to steal, kill, and destroy, and that the devil leads the whole world astray. I now know that Satan was not just trying to prevent me from one day having a ministry, or from having heavenly rewards, but that He was aiming for my spiritual death! As someone who now rightly sees in Scripture that a Christian can absolutely shipwreck their own faith, losing their future inheritance of salvation, I can testify this is also the time when I came the closest to losing mine.

I cannot put into words, what it feels like to know I was standing on the very edge of the pit of eternal condemnation. I also cannot put into words the gratitude I feel towards Father, that in His mercy, He did not permit me to fully fall, because I was still walking in ignorance of His truth in this matter.

1 Timothy 1:13 - Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief.

I did something in this story that rightfully warranted my eternal death. God could have easily been justified in doing so. Even the apostle John warned that there is a sin that leads to death, and clearly he is speaking of *spiritual* death, as evidenced by the fact that he says in regard to the sinner who has not physically died, that, "God will give him life".

1 John 5:16 - "If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that."

Clearly, the sinner was never physically dead, such that God would bring him back to physical life. The life and death which John is speaking of is *spiritual* death, not a physical death. If you do a study on dead and death in the New Covenant, you will see that 90% of the Scriptures in context indicate the subject is of spiritual death. I don't know how exactly how close I came to it, but I believe I must have almost kissed spiritual death on the lips.

1 Timothy 5:6 – The widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives.

James 2:26 – ..the body without the spirit is dead...

Revelation 3:1 – You have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.

I believe that I came very, very close in one single moment of ship-wrecking my faith on the rocks of spiritual death. Perhaps one more time, might have been all it took to grieve the Holy Spirit for good, and He would have departed from me permanently. What a terrifying thing to consider!

Hebrews 10:31 – What a dreadful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God.

I have received many, many emails from Christians who feel confident that this has happened to them. According to the apostle John in 1 John 5:16, when I see someone who has committed a sin which has led to their spiritual death, there is no use in my praying for them. How unbelievably tragic that is to consider! There are too many warnings in Scripture, to list in this chapter, about holding on to our faith, and not losing our salvation, but I compiled them all in a free book on the RelentlessHeart.com website called, "Once Saved Always Saved?", if you would like a copy of them.

Romans 11:20-22 - "Do not be arrogant, but afraid. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either. Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off."

1 Timothy 1:19 - "Holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith."

Luke 8:13 – "They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away."

I find these parts of my story, the parts which show how much I was given to weakness and temptation in my desire for the opposite sex, to be among the most humiliating parts of my story. I must admit that I took great comfort when I first found out that Saint Augustine had a terrible weakness with the opposite sex as well, perhaps even much worse than mine. Personally, I despise this carnal weakness which makes us no different than spiritless, godless, animals, and I thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who finally gave me freedom in this area, even before I married Persis.

Instances like this, and my years of weakness in this area, are among the other many reasons this book would have been more properly titled, "Astonishing Grace & MERCY to the Chief of All *Fools*".

The Subtle Temptation to Compromise

*Genesis 3:3 – "Did God **really** say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"*

Jill and I had our first coffee date on November 11th 2011, 11/11/11, and when she sat down in her chair on that first meeting just as it turned 11:11am, I was stunned, and knew it meant something, but had no idea what! I suspected it might be a sign from the Lord that this was part of His good plan for me. However, after about 3 days of talking, I felt she was not emotionally available, and was better suited for a guy who

loves football and camping. I had also seen some possible red flags in the area of sexual purity, which I was very much wanting to preserve.

On my trip to Florida, she defended herself and convinced me to give the relationship another chance, and so I did. Upon returning to Alabama, Jill and I started seeing each other and soon I was feeling those brain chemicals of love. She was intelligent, exciting, funny, a hard worker, athletic, she loved Jesus, loved her children, and she seemed really excited to be with me.

My primary love language was affection, and so was hers, so the fireworks started going off in my heart right away. To be desired physically by someone like her, after living for years with Jennifer, was intoxicating, and that intoxication is what led me to start compromising and looking the other way on things I would start to see as spiritual red flags.

She was very honest and open about her past. She grew up in a professing Christian home, but she really seemed to struggle with sexual purity before and after her first marriage. These insights combined with her lack of discretion in several other ways, led to my having many fears and jealous thoughts early on in the relationship.

I began thinking about how other men had known her more fully than me, and naturally I wanted to be able to put out the fires of insecurity which were raging in my heart because of that. Each time we had a disagreement or during these times of serious internal doubt and conflict about this relationship, I would see a conspicuous 11:11. Incredibly, several times I would leave her house in the evening, feeling upset from a conflict we just had, and somehow I would know that by the time I got home, 20 miles away, it was going to be 11:11. I caught on video once where I pulled into my parent's driveway from her house, and it turned to 11:11pm just as I did. I saw the 11:11 so many times when I was feeling frustrated and confused, that I felt like the Lord was encouraging me with it, perhaps reminding me that we had met on 11/11/11 at 11:11am, as a sign that this was from Him.

I don't remember how long it took, but even after talking repeatedly about sexual purity and not having sex before marriage, the time came where I fell into sexual immorality with her. It did not bother her conscience at all, but it did mine severely. As I shared my thoughts and understanding of Scripture with her, she explained her viewpoint, which was more liberal.

She told me that she had already struggled with this pre-marital sex conflict before and had concluded that even though the Bible says in Hebrews 4:15, "*Jesus was tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin*", that this wasn't true because he wasn't tempted sexually like she was. Looking back on this, I can see that this is the same kind of rotten fruit which Satan offered Eve, "*Did God really say...fill in the blank*" I have to admit that when she told me this, essentially offering me to eat from the same piece of fruit she had eaten, I was tempted to take a bite. This sounded like a pretty interesting point and she spoke very confidently in her Christian counseling and grace rhetoric.

I didn't realize it at the time, but the reason she wasn't struggling with this as a sin anymore is because she had seared her conscience as with a hot iron (1 Timothy 4:2). I remained confused for a while, tossed back and forth about what to believe, giving into the temptation of the flesh several times along the way. I wasn't willing to eat the "hyper grace" fruit she had eaten, but I tried to soothe my own conscience with thoughts about "future marriage", and by voraciously studying the Bible and noting that nowhere in the Bible did it plainly say, "*do not have sex before you are married.*"

I read through Leviticus 18 and 20, to see how God defined sexual immorality, making note of the fact that God tells all the people *who* they are not supposed to have sex with. It was clear that you should not have

sex with all your various blood family members, any animals, and that you shouldn't rape someone else's fiancé, but it was not clear that you could not have consensual sex with a partner who you were in a committed relationship with. I remember telling the Lord, *"I'm not sleeping around Lord...I'm not going after prostitutes just to gratify the flesh...I'm just trying to enjoy that deep exclusive connection with the woman you seem to have given me."* I remember thinking the Lord could have shortened the entire chapter of Leviticus 18 by simply saying, *"Do not have sex with anyone except your spouse"*, but He did not say that, and I felt that was perhaps giving me some loop hole for pre-marital sex.

Nonetheless, each time I engaged in the act, I found my conscience was violated and the shame and guilt burned painfully in my heart and mind afterwards.

Acts 24:16 – So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.

Romans 2:15 – They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.)

Romans 14:23 – "Everything that does not come from faith is sin."

1 Timothy 3:9 – They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience.

I still had very poor understanding about just how serious sexual sin was, and I was being tempted towards the greasy grace doctrine that "no one's perfect...everyone sins...we are all covered under grace". Although, I didn't yet have the faith or even know of the available power from the Holy Spirit to help me put this sin down. Even worse, I was naïve about my own strength to keep myself pure. Many times, I would drive to her house during the day, feeling strong, and resolved to honor God and resist all temptations. I even resolved to be a good example to Jill, so she could see a different kind of Christianity.

Galatians 6:1 – Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.

Everyone in my family knows that my brain almost literally turns off at about 8:30pm each night. It was terribly foolish for me to stay at her house so late, leaving myself too tired, and too weak, to resist the temptations of my flesh, thinking I still had the same strength of the day on my side. I came to realize in a few of those late evening moments of temptation, that even if someone would have laid an open Bible on my forehead, it would not have stopped my flesh.

From this experience, I can better understand how it was that the disciples were able to fall asleep the very night that Jesus was to be betrayed, and when they were supposed to be praying.

Matthew 26:41 - "The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

I was not a new believer without the power of the Holy Spirit to put down this sin. I was not truly a slave to sin, where I could not get out. I was not stuck in the Romans 7 experience of many Christians, where Paul explained that when He was a Jew, still under the law, that he did not have the power to do good.

Romans 7: 15- I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out."

I was simply ignorant of how dangerous the ground I was walking on was, and of how much power was already available to me to put this thing down, and how much I was lacking in self-control.

The flesh is indeed a devil, an adversary against God and His righteous ways. I believe the closest I ever came to intentionally sinning, trampling the grace of Christ, and losing my salvation was during this relationship.

I remember one time, where after deliberating in my mind if I should give into to the temptation again or leave, I dove head long into the sin, completely sober of mind, knowing exactly what I was doing, essentially telling myself I would repent later. Looking back, I cannot believe I did this! That is an example of how strong and how stubborn and rebellious the flesh is. I will not hold back but to tell you that looking back on that moment, remembering the evil desire that was in my heart, knowing I was trampling the blood of the covenant that sanctified me, putting my salvation on the line, scares the HELL out of me, literally!

Proverbs 25:28 – Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control.

Please don't let anyone try to tell me that God is so Sovereign that we cannot resist his grace, that we don't have a vital role to play in our salvation in Christ, or that we can never lose our salvation because of Christ's blood atonement of our sins. Don't let any person tell me that I don't have any responsibility in seeing that I endure to the end of my life in my faith, practicing self-control, that I don't trample the blood that atoned for my PAST SINS (2 Peter 1:9) holding firmly to the faith I profess in Christ (Heb 4:14, 2 John 1:8-11, Rev 3:11).

I know better, and I tell you that I, Michael Chriswell, can absolutely insult the Spirit of grace, and I can absolutely grieve the Holy Spirit by my lack of self-control, and I can absolutely LOSE my future inheritance of salvation by allowing myself to be removed from His hands or separated from His love. I have walked right up to that line in my own ignorance, but because of my ignorance and because I feared God and hated my sin, He was merciful to me.

“Oh, thank you my merciful God for looking past my deadly ignorance in that moment, as I walked right up to the edge of the bottomless cliff. You are forever to be praised and forever to be loved for forgiving me of such criminal deeds against your Spirit. Thank you so much Abba!”

Hebrews 10:26-30 – If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire which will consume the enemies of God. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who had trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?

How God Scared the SIN Right Out of Me

He was going to show me my ignorance and teach me that I already had the power to put down this sin, through self-control, in a very scary way.

I fell into this temptation with her several times, and each time, I would resolve to never let this happen again, as I drove home in the dark pleading with God for forgiveness and for help. She was respectful of my desire to fight against it, but she didn't have that desire to put it down herself, and she felt no violations of her conscience as a result. It's like she was waiting for me to one day just be ok with it.

According to the word of God, we can learn from this story that I was truly born again by the Spirit of Jesus Christ and she was not. She called herself a Christian, she went to church, she said she loved Jesus, she

prayed, she read the Bible, and she was even going to get a Master's degree in so called "Christian Counseling", but even after all of that, she was still not a true Christian according the Word of God.

I was not able to continue in the sin, while she had no problem doing so. There was a battle going on inside of me between my flesh and the Holy Spirit, a conflict, that she did not have.

Galatians 5:17 – "For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want."

That conflict was the evidence that I was born again. The fact that she had no conflict is a sure sign that a person is not born again, or they have walked away from the faith, having seared their conscience. I was not yet conscious of these Biblical truths that I am now sharing, I only knew that in my experience the sin was very painful for me and that I couldn't keep doing it...there was a WAR inside of me!

Romans 8:8-9 "Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature, but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ."

1 John 3:6 – No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.

1 John 3:9 – No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God.

1 John 5:18 – We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin..

This was only one red flag of several that I would see along the way. There were quite a few other bothersome things that started causing me real concern, like her lack of discretion. We also did not have the same level of spiritual intensity and this caused quite a few hurtful talks or disagreements. And, each time I had doubts, or we had a disagreement, I would see a very conspicuous 11:11.

Because I had taken off my breastplate of righteousness (Eph 6:14), the Lord was pleased to let me be attacked in my mind mercilessly by the devil, to discipline me and turn me from this sin. God was not going to waste this training period. I started becoming overwhelmed with thoughts of jealousy about her past relationships and her being around other men in inappropriate ways.

One time, I started having obsessive thoughts about her past sexual relationships and no matter how hard I tried I could not get the thoughts to go away—they became a full assault on my mind and soul. It felt an awful lot like what the godless Psychologist may even call "mental illness". The Bible, however, calls it *flaming arrows* from the evil one (Eph 6:16), and when they cannot be extinguished by faith, it very well may be because the Lord is bringing discipline, or even cursing and punishment. God even told the Israelites that one of the curses for their disobedience would be mental illness.

Deuteronomy 28:28 NLT - "The Lord will strike you with madness, blindness, and panic."

One time my anxiety got so bad that I had to immediately leave her house during a visit, drive down a country road and pull off on the side because I was having nothing short of a spiritual panic attack. I called my friend Larry in Florida and desperately asked him to pray for me. Prayer was only going to give me temporary relief because what I needed was to stop sinning, even if meant "*ripping out my own eye or cutting off my own hand*" (Matthew 5:29-30). In other words, I needed to deal with my sin drastically. Just as Solomon pointed out in Proverbs 25:28, my walls were broken down and the enemy was having a hay

day on my heart and mind with all his arrows. It was truly “open season” on Michael because of my lack of self-control.

After this panic attack experience I tried very hard and we had success for a good period of time, and then I would fall right back into it. This happened about 15 times over the 7 months we dated, until finally God scared the sin right out of me, one night.

The last time I put myself in this situation where I fell into sin, I found myself driving home again at 2am in the morning, totally defeated, crying, and feeling so guilty saying the same old, “*I’m sorry and please help me God*” as always. This time, as I cried out, “*Please help me stop this Lord!*”, He finally spoke. In my spirit I heard these words. “*Do you really want me to help you with this?*” That is all I heard, but it was followed by this terrifying insight and understanding from the Spirit. The Lord was saying to me, “*If you cannot control your own self, I can indeed help you and control you. I can make it so that you can never have sexual relations ever again. Do you really want me to help you with this?*”

I was instantly sobered up about the seriousness of my lack of self-control. I felt the fear of God wash over my whole spirit. I was terrified! The Sovereign God of the Universe was telling me He can afflict my body such that I would never be able to enjoy sexual intimacy ever again, since I could not control myself. Terror...sheer terror struck me. It was not even the terror of just never being able to have sex again, as much as it was the severity of knowing that God was willing and able to handicap me if I could not control myself. After that night, it never happened again, but our relationship struggles continued due to the fact that we were actually unequally yoked.

I had seen so many rotten fruits that I thought needed to be changed in her life and I had been begging God to change them all. She was addicted to running, one of her best friends was a homosexual who was influencing her world view, she let her children watch ESPN and play sports practically 24/7, she never intentionally taught her children about Biblical principles or following Christ, her parents basically ignored me every time they came around, the entire family worshipped sports, they made me feel stupid talking about how God was dealing with me, and thought I was legalistic because I talked about the need for obedience, etc.

I even started feeling like I had to leave Jesus in the car, when I came over to her house, so that she wouldn’t be offended, and no arguments would ensue. It had become obvious that her approach to God was through more Psychological head knowledge, not childlike faith and obedience to Jesus from her heart. I also continued to struggle with major areas where she completely lacked discretion. Not only was her conscience not violated by pre-marital sex, but she also had no problem as a Christian woman, wearing spandex to the grocery store for any man to see, or going for a 10 mile run in the woods, at a new trail, 60 miles away, all alone, or jumping up into the arms of an attractive former colleague right in front of me, like she was an excited little five year old girl.

Proverbs 11:22 – Like a gold ring in a pig’s snout is a beautiful woman who shows no discretion.

We began arguing about this more and more, and I just kept praying for her to have eyes to see this. It became more and more clear to me that she was a girl who was craving the feeling of love and affection from men, which she never received from her mother and father. In my humble opinion, here was another person wanting a master’s degree in counseling, first so she could figure out her own self.

I couldn’t understand why God seemingly wanted me to persevere in the relationship, constantly showing me the 11:11 reminder of when we met, and yet He wasn’t answering my prayers to help her to grow in Christ, and I was constantly being tempted to compromise.

Then, one day in my car, just after I had been thinking about the fact that I felt like I was spiritually compromising with Jill, I heard Greg Laurie preaching on the radio saying, *“Do not settle...do not compromise in your choice of a spouse...wait for God’s best...even ask the Father to give you someone ahead of you spiritually.”* That message gave me such conviction that I was indeed compromising and that I needed to end the relationship and wait for God’s best. I initially had some strong doubts and sadness about ending the relationship, and we tried to get back together one more time for a few weeks, but again we split up and decided we couldn’t even be friends. We needed a clean split from one another.

Then, on September 23rd 2012, while laying down resting, I sat up instantly like a scene in a movie with the revelation of 11:11. I had gone to the trail that morning and asked, *“Lord, why of all the numbers you have shown me is 11:11 not a Bible verse, and why do I still not know what it means, and why did you tell me to stick this out and then not change her, and also why am I no longer seeing 11:11 every day, now that we are broken up?”*

The Spirit finally gave me insight, in answer to my prayer, and showed me that it was indeed a verse of Scripture. He led me in that very moment to Luke 11:11, and when I read it, I burst out in emotion and could not believe that the Lord had been trying to tell me this the entire time but I was unable to hear it.

Luke 11:11 “Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead?”

The Lord gave me additional insight to show me how He had given me a promise for a new wife one day, back on November 17th, 2010, with that wonderful confirmation of the two birds, but since that time, I had been trying to help him out and pick my own. It was then like He said to me, *“Do not ask me for my best and then only believe me only for a fixer upper.”* Jill loved the idea of God, but she was not in love with Him enough to obey Him and surrender her whole heart and will to Him. We were indeed unequally yoked even though she professed life-long faith in Christ.

Titus 1:16 – “They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny Him.”

1 John 2:3-6 “We know that we have come to know Him if we obey his commands. The man who says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him.”

Jill claimed to know God, but she was not obeying some of his most basic commands. It was so humbling to realize that God had been warning me from the very first minute she sat down in the chair in front of me, but I could not hear Him. To say I felt like a spiritual stooge in that moment when God turned the lights on for me about the 11:11, is an understatement!

I truly believe that my disobedience was what was keeping Father from allowing me to understand what He was trying to tell me. Oh, how important to remain humble and obedient before the Lord. My spiritual ears had been stopped up, by my running ahead of God, and by my lack of self-control. How humbling for me, and how patient of God. I only needed to be willing to suffer in my flesh for a little while, by denying it the gratification it was looking for, and then I would have heard the speaking voice of God, much sooner!

I learned a great deal about sin and temptation and spiritual warfare in that season. Ironically, my falling into temptation and struggling with sin stirred up a much stronger desire for obedience and holiness in me.

Psalm 119:67,71 “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word. It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees.”

Ironically, my falling into sin those times became the catalyst for me, which caused me to stand even stronger against the hyper grace Jill was believing in. I began to really hunger and thirst for His righteousness and the denial of self, not just for the feel-good Christianity which is so prevalent today.

Many people are in love with the idea of God, and the idea of Christ and his salvation, but not many love his Holiness or His cross. The Bible says that true love for God is obedience to His commands as taught in the New Covenant. (See John 14:21-23 and 1 John 5:14)

Excerpt from January 13th Streams in the Desert Devotional

“Temptation is necessary to settle and confirm us in the spiritual life. It is like the fire which burns in the colors of mineral painting, or like winds that cause the mighty cedars of the mountain to strike more deeply into the soil. Our spiritual conflicts are among our choicest blessings, and our great adversary is used to train us for his ultimate defeat.”

All these years later, God has redeemed my sinfulness, and making me strong, firm, and steadfast raised me as a full-time Christian worker to call His chosen people into the abundant life of Christ which comes only by a life of obedience and faith. May His name be forever praised and forever loved for showing someone like me so much mercy!

This is the part of my story where Christ truly set me free from sin, and where I no longer practiced any known sin or allowed myself to be a slave to any sin. It wasn't the last sin I ever committed, but falling into a sin, is far different than practicing it, as I was in this story. Sin was no longer going to be my master, pulling my chain whenever it wanted.

John 8:31-36 – “To the Jews who had believed him. Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. They answered him, “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?” Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So, if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

There were, and still are, many ways that I fall short of the glory of God. Those are also areas of sin...and as the Father has continued to show me the ways I fall short, I have continued to honestly confess it, humbly admit my powerlessness to oust it when it required more than self-control, pronounce my faith in Him to defeat it, and have waited patiently until He delivered me. This is the Christian life, from victory to victory, from glory to glory, steadily being conformed into the image of Jesus Christ. What an adventure!

Chapter 28

The Beginning of Several Years of Intense Testing

Deuteronomy 8:2 - “Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.”

As we move forward in the story, I think it will be helpful for you if you don't just enjoy the story, or look for what dramatic things will happen next, but that you take intentional notice to see how and why God was going to *test* me in so many different ways, to see if I would obey Him and remain faithful in everything.

This will increase your faith in God and your understanding of how He deals with some of His servants, especially those whom He wants to promote into a full-time Christian work. You'll have a better understanding of what exactly transpired and how I started the work I do at RelentlessHeart.com.

I think you will be truly amazed at how thorough God was in testing me. The reason my ministry is having the kind of impact that it is, has absolutely nothing to do with me, or any other man, or ministry. It is simply because after God tested me, like He has many others, for several years, He found me faithful enough to allow His Spirit and power to rest on my ministry. That is why so many people are truly being changed by the work, and not just having their ears scratched. And all of this has nothing to do with me, in all my weakness, but in spite of my many weaknesses, the power of Christ is resting on me.

2 Corinthians 12:9 – Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

To this day, God still tests me and tries my faith. In fact, the entire year of 2018 turned out to be one of the longest and most difficult tests I've ever faced. It was an unprecedented type of suffering and darkness, where Father was pleased to withdraw His felt presence, His grace and His anointing from me for an entire year. I will no doubt tell much of that story in this book, when we get to it, Lord willing.

God's plan was to one day give me a ministry with significant impact for His kingdom, where thousands from around the world were going to be brought into a life of true surrender and obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ, simply by listening to my voice in a digital recording, a YouTube video, or a humble little discipleship workbook I wrote and self-published called [The John 7:17 Challenge](#).

I believe there are many who will read this book, whom God has plans to bless with a significant ministry. I believe these stories of my faith being tested are Father's rich blessings of encouragement and understanding to those who are currently being tested, and to those who will be. Please take a moment to consider this my dear brother or sister. Father very well could have chosen to keep these transparent personal examples in my life, a secret, but for *such a time as this*, I believe He is reaching through to richly bless others who He has called, or will call, to work in His field. I would have felt very blessed to have this much of a detailed autobiographical account of some other servant of the Lord, who had gone before me, in a path similar to mine.

If you wanted me to help find other stories that have this much detail about God's testing, and yet aren't too hard to read, I would be hard pressed to find anything beyond a Madame Guyon or George Muller autobiography. George Muller's autobiography was the only life example I had to hold on to, but his story does not share as many diverse testing's as you will read in this story. George Muller's testing seems to have primarily been in the area of finances, and perhaps his character was of such that he didn't need much more testing than that. This was certainly not the case for the former chief of all fools. I believe God tests us all differently and in accordance with two primary things, His unique plan and will for our life, and our natural character and disposition.

Someone once said, "*The bigger the test, the bigger the testimony and the bigger the mess, the bigger the message.*" I believe these are mostly true. If you are following in the footsteps of a Joseph or a King David and God has a huge mission for you, it shouldn't be surprising that you will need to face many years of difficult suffering and testing to prepare you.

If God is going to give you a significant ministry, it will require that He give you a significant amount of spiritual resources and grace through His Spirit. Since God is wise and does not squander His grace, He asks the questions, "*Can I trust you with all of this? Will you put this to good use so that I may receive a*

good return, or will you use this for your own selfish good? Can I give this to you without it causing you the defilement of pride, or will you remember all along that you are absolutely nothing apart from my power? Will you do my will to the end, or will you at some point choose to do your own? Are you truly doing this for my glory, or is your real motive to bring yourself glory?"

I would have thought I knew the answers to all those questions when I got started, but I wasn't going to truly know until after many years of testing. It is easy to feel faithful in a moment, or in a season, especially when things are going relatively well, but how will we stand up over time through difficult trials? Only the time and tests will tell.

There is no sermon, no book, no amount of Bible study, no amount of memorizing the Word, no Seminary degree, no trips to Israel, no amount of discipleship, and no amount of passionate words that can prove you to be faithful. The only way to prove your faithfulness is to have it repeatedly and painfully tested by trial and fire over many years. Only then, will you *and* God both know, by experience, if you are truly faithful.

Genesis 22:12 - "Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son."

Think about this. That test, where God said He now knew that Abraham feared Him, happened about 25 years or so after God first spoke to Him. Abraham had been tested many times over those years, but this was the *big* one that God finally acknowledged as faithfulness on Abraham's part. This shows us that there is no substitute for *time* under tension in the building and proving of one's faith. You may feel very filled with faith today, but you have no idea what comes tomorrow or the next day. Will you pass the test? When everything falls apart and you look totally defeated, when there is total darkness around you, when you've lost everything, including your dignity, will you keep going...will you keep trusting...will your faith stand? That is how genuine faith is proven.

1 Peter 1:6-7 "Though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proven genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed."

Not many are willing to pay the full cost to pass some of God's most intense fires and testing, but there is unspeakable heavenly reward and ministry opportunity for those who do.

God had already given me the vision of a significant impact my work for Him would have, but now it was going to be several more years of difficult testing before I would ever come close to seeing anything that could ever be called "significant". This too was another part of my testing.

Psalm 105:17-19 NLT – Then he (God) sent Joseph to Egypt, who was sold as a slave. They bruised his feet with fetters and placed his neck in an iron collar. Until the time came to fulfill his dreams (vision), the Lord tested Joseph's character.

The Great Temptation to Go Beyond God's Word

God, being a Romans 8:28 God, did not waste any part of the relationship I had with Jill for my training and testing. He not only tested me to see if I would compromise my conscience, by justifying and remaining in sexual immorality, but He was also going to test me at an even higher level to see if I would compromise on the all-sufficiency of His Word.

Judges 2:22 – I will use them to test Israel and see whether they will keep the way of the Lord and walk in it as their forefathers did.

Jill was much more intelligent, and much more well-read than I was, and she was half-way through getting her master's degree in Christian counseling at Liberty University. Throughout our relationship we often spoke about the problems that plague the human soul, and the things that essentially leave many adults mentally and emotionally wounded all their life—things like childhood abuse, neglect, and abandonment.

Jill had textbook answers, various Psychological methodologies of therapy, citations, and statistics for nearly every issue we discussed, whereas I had only Bible verses and Biblical principles. This led to many conflicts, whereupon she very much valued the contribution she believed Psychology had made to understanding of human thinking and behavior, while I held fast to the notion that the Word of God was *all* we needed.

2 Timothy 3:16 – All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

My emphasis was always on faith and trusting God for every single need, whereas she felt that was naïve and would say, “*Yes, trust God, but also leverage these wonderful techniques and methods that have been proven to help others find emotional and mental health.*” She was always very passionate and very convincing of what she believed, and her strongly expressed words of affection for Christ seemed almost to give credibility to her beliefs. Not to mention that so much of what she would share, indeed sounded interesting, even fascinating. I can see how people can get so drawn into Psychology; it's almost like scuba diving on a coral reef and being filled with anticipation about finding the next unknown life form.

I think people, like myself, who are so driven to make meaning of our lives, and who have experienced such chaotic childhoods, are especially susceptible to the counseling and psychological teachings of men, because they provide temporary pain relief, to our restless and confused hearts. They are telling a story of why and how we are the way we are, but it's a very different story than what the Bible tells.

Gambling also tells a story; if you don't quit playing, one day you could be rich. Like a gambling addict who always thinks the next pull of the slot machine, will be the one, we too can become addicted to self-help and Psychological teachings, believing that the answer to all our life problems is just around the next page, or perhaps in the next book. I know people who have wasted years of their lives gambling, and I know people who have wasted years of their lives seeking answers from the self-help section of the book store. Neither of these people are better off than the other. They have both been taken captive by a false story and a false hope. Just as gambling may yield just enough winnings to keep you playing for life, so too the Psychological writings of men will give you just enough help, to keep you “playing” for life.

Colossians 2:8 – See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

Here, God is warning Christ followers that if we are not careful to guard against this that we can actually be taken captive by deceptive things like Psychology and Philosophy and not even know it. I remember several times how strong the temptation was to open myself up to some of her Psychological learning and thinking. There is no doubt that godless men have come up with all kinds of very interesting philosophies, that seem to tell a well told story about all our pains and dysfunctions, as well as painting a clear road map to inner healing. However, I continued to remain adamant that God's Word is the only road map needed for the soul and spiritual life, and it has the only principles that can lead men to life and peace in the Spirit.

The real climax of my test was reached one time during a conversation where Jill stated emphatically, *“Michael, I have experience working with Dr. ’s of Psychology, and professional counselors and I can tell you that have to meet a person where they are first...you cannot just throw a Bible verse at a man with PTSD...they need more than a Bible to help them...trust me.”*

She had finally drawn a line in the sand of her beliefs, which put me to the final test. Would I believe all her experience, her superior intellect, her higher education, her convincing stories and experiences, her textbooks filled with statistics and “facts”? Or, would I take an uncompromising childlike position of faith? Would I keep standing in the faith that believes that the word of God and His grace is all-sufficient, and that there is no need, under any circumstances relating to traumas and anxieties of the soul, for a Christian to go beyond God’s word and Spirit for help?

Psalm 20:7 – Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.

Psalm 40:4 – Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust, who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside to false gods [or doctrines of men and devils].

The men of Psychology are proud and many of its founders have literally turned aside to false gods.

Isaiah 2:22 – Stop trusting in man, who has but a breath in his nostrils. Of what account is he?

I tried to explain to Jill over and over that a person can go straight to Jesus Christ in prayer, through faith in His words and person. She had all but stated that Jesus Christ *alone* is not enough, and that a person needs to be met where they are first, and then you can perhaps introduce the Bible later.

That sounds like it makes total sense, but only to a person who has no real trust in God, and who does not yet know Him at all, or very well. There is no way a person who truly knows God, could ever suggest the need to go to someone or something else first, for matters of the soul.

Jeremiah 17:5 – Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the Lord.

You can know “church” and religion, and recommend going to a man for help, but you cannot actually know Christ and make that same recommendation. If a counselor doesn’t actually know the Lord in personal relationship and power (1 Cor 4:20), naturally they will refer their clients to the Psychological philosophies and methods of men, perhaps with a few Bible verses sprinkled along the way, so we can ease our consciences and call it “Christian counseling”. I tried to give Jill an illustration to show her how truly foolish this type of thinking is, with something like the following.

I said, let’s imagine a new story in the gospels about a man who was struggling with PTSD (which by the way is a man-made Psychological label which God Himself would not use), but nonetheless, let’s say there he is standing on the street corners in Nazareth when Jesus is walking through.

He starts crying out like the blind men in Matthew 9:27 to Jesus, *“Have mercy on me, Son of David!”*. In the actual story of the blind men, they came to Jesus privately and He asked them, *“Do you believe that I am able to do this?”* They replied, *“Yes, Lord”* and then He touched their eyes and said, *“According to your faith will it be done to you.”* And their site was restored. Now, let’s re-write that story to accommodate the popular belief that Jesus and the Bible are just simply not enough, but that instead a man needs professional counseling or therapy for something as tragic as PTSD.

When the man came to the Lord privately, asking to be made well from his PTSD, Jesus said, *“I cannot do this. You must first go to the teachings and methods of clever and well-educated men, men who have studied*

human behavior and who understood your very complicated mental health condition. They will meet you where you are. I am able to heal blind eyes, unstop deaf ears, make lame legs walk, walk on water, feed thousands of people from five loaves and two fish, turn water into wine, heal the sick, cast out demons, forgive sin, change men's hearts, and raise the dead, but I cannot help you with PTSD. Instead, you must go to men and get your mental illness taken care of first, and then come back and follow me."

And as ridiculous as this sounds, this is the unbelief of many so called "Christian" counselors, telling themselves, and others, that you can't just send people straight to undiluted person and teachings of Jesus Christ, but instead you have to first *meet them where they are at*. If a person does not start with fully trusting Jesus, at the time of their greatest need, why in the world would they ever truly trust Jesus later?

If you are a secular counselor or Psychologist, yes give the person all your latest therapies and pills. However, if you are a true Christian "counselor", you better show that person how they can go straight to Jesus for help, knowing that He helps "little children" that cannot help themselves.

Matthew 18:3 "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

If a person will not go directly to Jesus, then what good is there, as a "Christian counselor", in giving him temporary relief but leaving the condition of his spirit unchanged and his eternal destination still as hell?

John 6:27 - "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you."

There is no long-term hope for that person. Jesus Christ is the only person that can bring life and peace and His are the only words which lead to true inner healing and eternal life.

John 6:63 - "The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life."

Matthew 11:28-30 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your weary souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Romans 8:6 "The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace."

And not all can come to Jesus Christ, but if we call ourselves Christians, we had better be at least pointing people to Him as the source of all help and life. If a person cannot hear, that is God's responsibility, not ours.

John 6:65 - "No one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him."

Although the temptations were great at times, and the fiery arrows of doubt came, in the end I held stubbornly to my child like faith that the Word of God is all anyone needs. My position was the position of faith, and I became defensive of my Father's word and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. It made me angry to realize how many people call themselves Christian counselors, who then do not fully believe in the power of Christ, and instead have added all kinds of other Psychological principles and worldly counseling methods to their approach.

1 Timothy 4:1 - The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.

Long before I saw Dave Hunt's much needed and outspoken teachings on the deception of Psychology in the church, and long before I understood the atheist influences of men like Sigmund Freud, or the demonic

influences of men like Carl Jung, who admitted to having a spirit guide named Philemon, I had already chosen to believe and take my stand on the Word of God *alone*.

Men hate the SIMPLE teachings and truths of Christ, and they cannot resist in their pride, but to go beyond the word of God, in order to make followers of themselves. I cannot even glance over the dozens of different psychoanalysis and counseling methods without cringing inside. One day, God will bring the pride and wisdom of the so called “wise” to absolutely nothing!

1 Corinthians 1:19 – For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.” Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

Anytime I have ever gone outside of God’s word, to the tempting teachings of sincere men, it has been a mistake and the results, if any, have always been temporary. If you have no faith, you will need to run to men because God can do nothing for you (Hebrews 11:1,6), but if you have even a mustard seed of faith, then the Lord Jesus Christ is the name you need to call upon in order to be healed, delivered, and saved (Acts 2:21)

The Tantalizingly Sweet Words of Men

Who doesn’t want to better understand why they are the way they are, and why they do what they do? Psychologists and Counselors have filled volumes of books about the human condition and all of it sounds very interesting and fascinating to our natural human desire to make meaning. However, we are followers of Jesus Christ, and we are not to find our world view, life view, or story pieces the same way as the world does. We are not to lean on our own understanding, and we are not to lean on the hollow and deceptive philosophies and wisdom of men. See Proverbs 3:4-6 and Colossians 2:8.

As someone who has suffered for decades to make my life work, and to make sense out of it when it didn’t, I believe I could easily write all kinds of interesting thoughts and wise sounding insights I have, but I resisted that temptation. What I would have to say would be very interesting to the ears and might make perfect sense. Much of it might even be true, but I would be leading you to trust in my own words, rather than in the power of the Spirit and God’s written word.

1 Corinthians 2:1-5 “When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom...my message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.”

1 Corinthians 4:6 – “Do not go beyond what is written.” Then you will not take pride in one man over against another.

It is not a coincidence that just last night I watched a movie called “The Heart of a Man” on Netflix. The movie was beautifully produced and appears to attempt to change the image of God that many Christian men, trapped in sexual sin, seem to have, through a modern cinematic retelling of the prodigal son story.

If you do not watch this movie with a critical Scriptural eye, testing it to see if it is in accord with sound doctrine, you might come away thinking, “*WOW, what a wonderful job they did...so powerful...what encouragement to men trapped in sin...what in depth insight by Dr. Dan Allender into how sexual abuse affects us...this is a great documentary...praise God!*”

Let me tell you what I saw as I measured it against the whole counsel of the word of God (Acts 20:27). I saw a movie that will no doubt leave many professing “Christian” men feeling that no matter how much they sin, that God is never mad at them, and there is no need to feel shameful about their 7 affairs, even if you stay stuck in your sin for many more years, because God is *all* love and *all* mercy.

They are selling an image of God that *does not* exist, just like the small-town preacher who preaches almost exclusively the wrath of God—they are both *wrong*. When men try to market God with a new and improved image, they forget three important Biblical principles about how people are attracted to God and saved, and none of them have to do with making movies which emphasize only one side of God.

1. No one can come to Jesus Christ unless God enables them. (John 6:65)
2. We are to be an example to others through our faithful and obedient life (Matthew 5:16, John 13:34-35, Romans 5:19).
3. We are to watch our life and doctrine closely (1 Timothy 4:16)

I don't know how many tens of thousands, or hundreds of thousands of dollars were spent to make that one movie, but I believe God has made more men truly righteous through one simple life of obedience, than He ever will through a movie like that.

Romans 5:19 – Through the obedience of the one, the many will be made righteous. Not by making a movie depicting God as an old man that could never possibly be angry or judge anybody. That is *not* true!

This is why the Holy Spirit commanded us in Romans 11:22 to consider *both* sides of God, his kindness *and* his strictness. Movies like, “The Heart of Man” and Bible tracts like “Father’s Love Letter” only emphasize the loving side of God, which is heresy. Here again is where some will say, “*But Michael, you have to meet people where they are at.*” Ok, what did it sound like when John the Baptist met people where they were at in their sin?” Go read Matthew 3:10, 12. What did it sound like when Jesus met sinners where they are at? Go read Matthew 5:30 and Luke 13:3. What did it sound like when Peter met sinners where they were at? Go read Acts 2:38, 40. What did it sound like when Paul met believing sinners where they were at? Go read 1 Corinthians 5:11,13.

You cannot reconcile the majority of what is being produced in the name of Christ today, with the whole counsel of God in Scripture. God never emphasizes only His loving side in Scripture, and as we can see when it comes to sin in the life of believers, He rarely emphasizes his loving side at all, but only warnings and wrath to come.

*John 3:36 – He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but **he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.***”

*Romans 2:5 – But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, **you are storing up wrath against yourself** for the day of God’s wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed...for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.*

2 Thessalonians 1:8 – He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power.

I don't remember the words sin, repentance, or hell ever being mentioned in that movie. After John 8:36 was shown on the screen at the very beginning, again without the previous verses 31-35 which show that the requirement to be set free is to *obey* the teachings of Christ, not to change your image of God into a loving old “Teddy bear” of a man. I don't recall one single Scripture spoken in the entire film by any of

the speakers or testimonials. All you hear are the eloquent and emotional words of men and the name of Jesus Christ is heard perhaps less than six times in an hour and half. Look at what Peter taught about how those who serve God by speaking, should do so.

*1 Peter 4:11 – “If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking **the very words of God.**”*

An almost 90-minute movie about God, yet with only one incomplete sound bite of what God’s words actually are. How in heaven can God be pleased with a movie about Him, that has no words of His in it? Please, let me ask you, do you really think that God is pleased with a movie about Him where His words have been replaced by the words of men?

We hijack His name, His person, His love, His salvation, His forgiveness, Parts of His character, and yet we set aside practically all of His words, as if they are no longer relevant or working, and instead replace them with new and contemporary thoughts of clever men. Look what Jesus said about this!

John 7:18 – “He who speaks on his own does so to gain honor for himself, but he who works for the honor of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him.”

John 12:49 – “For I did not speak on my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it.”

You can have everything God wants you to have, as a child of His, without having to depend on the human wisdom and interesting conclusions and philosophies of men, even “Christian” ones. A great number of times I have read through the books of very respected Christian men, only to conclude that I am already enjoying the result they are teaching, without ever having to read their book, or know any of the *neat* things they know. I achieved the result as a promise from God, by believing and obeying His words in childlike humility.

Men love complicating things, and not many are willing to set aside their pride and remain as a humble child before the Lord, as Christ commanded in Matthew 18:3-4. No one *pays* for simple, and it’s hard to make a living unless you become an expert. Instead, men want to appear knowledgeable, respectable, valuable, and useful to others. Knowledge indeed puffs them up in their own eyes and in the eyes of men.

I now know by experience that the Word of God and the grace of God are all we need for any and every issue we face in this life. This is despite the many convincing arguments and temptations that surround us, screaming that it isn’t! But those arguments are in spite of the fact that there are 1,879 years of Christian testimony *before* Psychology was even invented in the year 1879. This proves that God’s word and the Lord Jesus Christ alone, have been more than enough for every human issue of the soul that ever came up. Why aren’t they now? Did God not know about the problems we would face in our day? Did he not know about PTSD? Did He leave critical help out of his book and now only reveals the secrets to men and women of Psychology?

God spoke of, and even ordained, mental illness for the Israelites if they disobeyed Him, 3,262 years before Sigmund Freud was even born. See Deuteronomy 28:28. The word of God is true and complete and our heavenly Father did not leave out anything that we may need, in order to be spiritually alive and emotionally complete. Men say God’s word is just not enough. What does God say?

Take a look at these beautiful passages which describe the all-sufficiency and power of the Word of the Lord, to change lives.

Psalm 19:7-11 – The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

Jeremiah 23:29 “Is not my Word like fire,” declares the Lord, “and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?”

Hebrews 4:12 For the Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

I prayed many times that God would help Jill to see the truth, but my prayers remained unanswered because they were not in accordance with God’s will. It is not God’s will to change a person’s mind against their own will, especially those who do not love *the* truth, or who in the pride of their hearts think they already know the truth.

I have come across a great number of people in my ministry that are absolutely convinced that they know the truth of a certain principle or doctrine. However, when no one is around, in total humility before the Lord, they have never truly cried out to God, confessing their own spiritual blindness and their need for His Spirit to teach them the word. Instead, many people read the Bible, or listen to a sermon, and then believe they have received the truth through their own intellect or cleverness, or someone else’s. We must have the humility of a child, which so few men have, in order to see *the* truth. This is how millions end up blind and deceived, while claiming they can see.

*John 9:39 – Jesus said, “For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind [spiritually blind].” Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, “What? Are we blind too?” Jesus said, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; **but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.**”*

The Pharisees thought they already knew all that they needed to know. They refused the simplicity of Jesus’s teachings and they refused to come directly to Him. God let’s men choose what they want to believe, and he allows those that do not believe, and those that do not love the truth, to be blinded to *the* truth.

2 Corinthians 4:4 – The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

2 Thessalonians 2:10-12 – They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason, God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness. [Psychology is founded in wickedness]