

JOY UNCEASING

“Behold, I AM coming soon! My reward is with Me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. I AM the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the Tree of Life and may go through the gates into the city.”

(Revelation 22:12-14)

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***Among the cloud of witnesses, there is a great and glorious light...
Immersed into the heavens, I see His Fullness radiant white.
I stand in awe, upon my knees, of One so Holy, as I bow...
Before the King of Kings... awaiting patiently my crown.
I feel so humbled by His Presence, I feel so healed and whole this day...
I see His Majesty, His Glory, as I extol His Holy Name.
The instant I was taken from this earth to meet my Lord...
All pain, and fear, released as I was pulled through Heaven's Door.
Led through the Valley of The Shadows, I watched you weep and pray and mourn.
As your compassion and your love reached through the heavens, I was torn.
But I could not take my eyes off, I couldn't focus on your grief...
For I know that God is faithful, my reward is at His Feet.
I suffered in such agony, and I'm no longer in great pain...
I see Life for all He is, and He consumes me every day.
With joy that is unceasing, inexplicable to men...
Words cannot describe Majestic Beauty with no end.
Do not grieve for me beloved, for I am whole and healed this day.
I have run my race; obtained My Prize, now I praise His Holy Name.
If you could only see His Glory, could see beyond the thoughts of man...
You would see that you're secure in the Hollow of His Hand.
You would know the depths I feel, that death is not the finished work.
That there is more beyond the glimpse; beyond the veil of upon this earth.***

***Look beyond your understanding, seek His Face and read His heart...
See beyond the veil toward Mercy, and pluck the others from the dark.
Concentrate on fellowship; He longs to walk with you...
To guide you in your steps, release your fears and comfort you.
When you close your eyes to sleep, rest in assurance I'm at peace.
All your prayers were not in vain, for they have brought me great release.
And thanks to you, I know His Fullness, and I pray for you this day...
That you will know His Joy Unceasing ... as you call upon His Name.
For God promises that tears will only last for but a time...
That joy comes in the morning for those who cling upon The Vine.
Please don't grieve for me, beloved, for I am happy and content...
I finally know The Love ... beyond the veil that has been rent.
I have a brand new body; I suffer no more earthly grief...
I spend my days with Joy Unceasing, placing Crowns at Jesus Feet.***

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Many times, when those who we love are taken Home without much warning, we are left in a shell-shocked state. I recently lost a friend, and it is a very painful thing. Over the years, I have questioned God relentlessly as to the "whys" of it all. Why do good people have to die? When my friend died, it was during a time of great confusion in my life and God chose to give me words that comforted me in ways I didn't expect.

The Lord had been telling me to "look to the joy that was set before me", and while I could see joy in one area of my life, I failed to see how my friend's death could bring "joy". Confirming His Word, as He always will, with personal words, He kept reminding me that ***"the joy of the Lord is my strength"*** (*Nehemiah 8:10*). God was trying to tell me that "the joy set before me" was His strength that was available to me in my pain. The only way I could receive strength to help me through this time, was by His Grace, through faith. When I dug deeper into the Word for what "joy" really meant, I was filled with such peace. All of a sudden, what I felt, and couldn't describe, even the feeling of guilt I experienced, especially in light of my friend's tragic death, was now making sense. What my Heavenly Father was trying to express was something much deeper than anything temporal. He was trying to teach me something that held Eternal meaning. Not merely head-knowledge, but a much deeper heart-knowledge. True Joy *is* inexplicable, there are no words to describe it, because there are no words to adequately describe the Glory of God's Presence. Joy, as defined in its depth through it's Hebrew meaning, (simcha), is simply the transforming power that flows out of the Innermost Tabernacle; The Most Holy Place inside the Holy of Holies.

Jean had a brain tumor and had been suffering for many more years than I knew her; but she never wavered in her faith. If there were only two words in the world that I could use to describe Jean, they would be steadfast and worshipful. No one deserved a Heavenly reward, better than Jean. When her body finally succumbed to death, it was sudden, she had gone to the doctor with pain in her head, and then she just slipped into a coma. Jean went Home a couple of days later. When I was able to Jean's death, through The Father's eyes, instead of through my own understanding, I no longer grieved her loss. I missed her terribly and when I began to think about the many other losses I've encountered and not understood, God would stop my thoughts and cause me to rejoice, from a depth inside me that I didn't even know existed. Jean's steadfast faith and her worshipful heart toward God solidified my own, and I knew one day I would meet her again.

We have a Father in Heaven Who - while we don't understand here on earth most times - He still knows what is best for ALL of His Children, and because God sent His only Son to save us, He proves that He has a special heart for those who don't even profess His Existence. We cannot know Him, until He reveals Himself to us. He knows the intricacies of each of our souls, and He knows why He created us individually. He knows

when each of our races start, He's careful to pay attention to the hurdles along the way, He's there to refresh us when we're exhausted, and He is there waiting at the Finish Line. For those who choose to get to know Him, God has appointed the time when each of us will cross the Finish Line to receive our reward. Jean's race is run. The baton has been passed. Perhaps it has been placed in your hands today. I need Kleenex every time I read "Joy Unceasing"; not because I am grieving over the loss of my friend, but because of the incredible, unexplainable mercy that our loving Father offers us in our time of need. Those words strike a cord of emotion that reach down into the depths one's soul; the picture they create is one of Pure Hope. Jean has now received her reward as a faithful witness for Christ, just as countless numbers of others have received over the generations.

My first taste of death hit home for me on a personal level about six months after I found the Lord. I would discover, not only the pain of physical death, but what spiritual death, and dying to self was all about. I had questioned God so many times during this period of time in my life; bitterness held tight onto my heart. Without having a real understanding of the Bible, I had the basics down. I'd knocked on the door of God's heart, I had asked for understanding, and I sought God with all my being. ***"Everyone who asks***

receives, and everyone who seeks shall find, and everyone who knocks, the door shall be opened.” (Matthew 7:7-8) I couldn’t reason why a loving Father, when His child asked for bread, He would give him a stone. It wasn’t right. The worst part was, I knew God’s Word wasn’t wrong, only my understanding of it, and unless He revealed it to me, I would never comprehend what He was trying to say.

I was angry, I was hurt, I felt betrayed for having to endure so much, with so little explanation. I was a child who wanted answers to life’s questions, and I rarely stopped asking, until answers came. I cried out to God in agony and disgust, displaying every emotion known to man; and like a child, I demanded to know “why”. God wasn’t answering my prayers, I felt as though He was ignoring me. But like any good father, I came to learn that God has His way of dealing with a rebellious heart; He remains silent until we address Him with respect. God needed me to understand this verse: ***“When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”*** (James 4:3). When we pray, and God is not answering, we need to check our motives. When I sought God from a position of pride and arrogance and anger, instead of humility and brokenness, I was seeking answers with wrong motives. I just wanted one little word to make the pain stop, I wasn’t

interested in the sixty-six volume set. The old adage applies, “*you give a man a fish, he eats for a day; you teach a man to fish, he will eat for a lifetime.*” It applies to spiritual things as much as it does in the natural. I learned that God will never give you a band aid to stop a bleeding artery and God wasn’t about to squander any trial Satan spun me through. My Father knew how deeply I hurt inside, and He wanted me to learn how to defeat Satan at his own game. Until God tugged on my heart and opened my heart to understand this verse, I wasn’t able to come to my Father with a right heart. ***“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”*** (Psalm 51:17). When I sat and pondered that verse, I felt impressed to turn further into the Psalms where I read the tenderest words I could’ve ever seen, ***“He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.”*** (Psalm 147:3)

When God saw me question Him out of a broken heart, a heart that had been crushed nearly to dust; when God saw the scales tip toward the direction that I would never trust Him again; He intervened. Like Job, Satan was sure that if I could be weighed down so early in my Christian walk, I would fall away from the faith and never serve my King. He was wrong. My father took all that I was, and one by one, He allowed things and people to be plucked out of my life. While I will never understand His

reasons behind allowing it, I could not continue in self pity and walk in blind ignorance; I had to keep searching. Added to all my failures, inadequacies and even my anger, God began to explain His Word. Just as Isaiah, and Job, and every other believer on this earth has questioned God in their grief, God's answer remains the same: ***“As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My Ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts higher than your thoughts.”*** (Isaiah 55:9).

Instead of questioning Him out of pride and arrogance, I began to praise Him for the many answers He'd given me over the years that I had inadvertently ignored. Even when I sought God under false doctrine and listened to false teachers all claiming to be preaching the real Gospel, one thing never wavered: I continued seeking. I stood on this verse, ***“But seek ye first the kingdom of heaven, and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you.”*** (Matthew 6:33). Eventually, “things” were added, only for me, it wasn't in the accumulation of material assets. It manifested in a deeper knowledge of who God really is. Do I know everything there is to know? Certainly not, and will never claim to know, but when you get even a glimpse of understanding Who He is, all things really are added exponentially. When God saw me question Him out of my brokenness and humility, it was then, and only then that He finally

answered. I never voiced it aloud, or to anyone else, but the sad truth is, I forgave God for putting me through life's wringer. That might sound incredibly blasphemous to some, but all I know is that when I told my Heavenly Father that I forgave Him, even though I didn't understand all the "whys", God reached down and gave me that one touch I craved with all my heart. He didn't criticize me for my ignorance, my arrogance or my contempt. He just touched me, and I felt His hand wipe the endless stream of tears from my cheek. I was brought lower than I ever thought possible, and in that instant, I asked my Father for His forgiveness.

While it might've been obvious to everyone else, it wasn't to me. It was the first time I realized how selfish I was, when in fact, I had gone through *nothing*, compared to what Jesus endured to make way for my salvation in the first place. Without Jesus, there would be no conversation with my Heavenly Father, and there would be no grace by which to stand, period. I learned that forgiveness opens doors that would otherwise remain closed forever, and got an astounding revelation deep down inside my soul of what God's Abiding Unconditional Love was all about. As I laid my head down to sleep that night, The Lord simply spoke to my heart and said, "*why do you doubt Who I AM? Why do you doubt that I've ever left you, or forsaken you? How do you know that I wasn't there through all of it and*

that there was a purpose?" I heard it so loudly, that it was almost as if it were spoken aloud. All I could do was cry myself to sleep. And in the morning, and throughout the course of my day, God began to answer the questions in my heart. To question God is to deny the faith, because faith is born of trust, and if I could not trust, I could not bear the fruit of faith. Without the fruit of faith, living is an exercise in futility.

My born-again experience began with me watching at popular television evangelist, as I sit in my living room, in unbelievable pain. I was one of those heretics that turned on televangelists just to make fun of them. But somehow, this man captured my attention back in 1989. I was mesmerized by his message of the Gospel; little did I know that term would become literal. I thought every time I spoke of my experience using the word "mesmerized" that I was just speaking in metaphors; but I wasn't. I experienced a genuine healing from God the Father, even while I was learning the Word of God under false teacher. My soul craved change, and I was spiritually dead. I didn't know I was hearing error; I was just so hungry for a miracle from God that I ate anything that was presented on a plate. If it sounded like Jesus, I took it as truth. That was my first of many, many mistakes. The second of many mistakes was that I sought the miracle, and not the Miracle Worker. God would later show me that one

can become so delusional under false teaching; it can look so real, that once they understand the Truth, they will realize that they've been consuming sand in the desert, instead of the Living Water they thought they were drinking. God's mercy in His Sovereignty granted me a genuine healing, but by all intents and purposes, it seemed purely emotion-based, from what I know now. I cannot explain my healing; all I know is that I remain healed. I believe this was the day I would embark on a seemingly endless journey to discover the difference between Truth and error. I remember this particular memory vividly.

I couldn't move my left arm and hand, so I held onto my left arm with the right one, and extended both of my hands to the television screen, as this preacher instructed; he mentioned something about a "point of contact". In agonizing pain, I yelled at the TV, as if expecting an answer. *"God, if You're really real, and You truly heal today, as this man says You do, THEN HEAL ME!"* As I remember this now, with the Spirit of The Lord shedding His Light onto that moment, I shutter at the level of contempt God must've seen in my heart. I wouldn't advocate addressing The Most High with that attitude, ever. I'm sure He's heard worse, but when children address their parents with that type of sarcasm, there is usually some kind of discipline coming down the road if they don't snap out of it and come to

their senses. I was one such child; one who didn't come to her senses soon enough and I would come to discover discipline by the hand of God.

At that point in life, I was a very angry person. My heart had hardened to the point that I couldn't see myself as being contemptuous; I thought I was justified. I didn't consider the fact that I was angry at life itself – that is - Life Personified. I saw, rather, my own life through tunnel vision, and a very narrow tunnel at that. I saw it as being so unfair by comparison to the rest of the world. I didn't mean to hold malice in my heart toward God, but that is exactly what was inside my heart - malice.

I was shattered inside. I was broken into pieces, literally. I was dealing with a chronic, incurable, debilitating medical condition that nearly made me lose my left arm to amputation while I was still in my twenties. I had nerve damage, as a result of a work injury to my neck - snapping it several times - and compressing nerves that caused incredible pain. I was misdiagnosed, and by the time the doctors put a name to what I had, my condition was given over to RSD, Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy. By the time my I received the proper diagnosis, I was pretty much worthless, as far as working gainful employment was concerned, and the outlook was bleak, at best. RSD carries with it horrendous pain and is exacerbated by stress; it feels like your bones are burning from the inside out. Part of the

problem with RSD is that you can develop severe and inconsistent temperature changes; in my case, my left arm was 15 degrees colder than my right arm; as confirmed by Thermography; a type of x-ray that examines the level of heat your body transmits, according to blood flow. My right arm was my only functioning limb, apart from my legs, which were slowly deteriorating, at least on my left side. I was losing circulation and strength in my left arm and some of the best cardiothoracic and neurosurgeons in the United States told me I may need to consider amputation if my condition didn't improve. Their logic was to prevent my limb from turning gangrenous from lack of blood flow, and thus affect the rest of my body. I thought they were insane, and I had no intention of allowing them to chop off my left arm. How could things deteriorate so fast?

I was afraid, I was lost, I was in utter physical torment. I angrily cried out to God that afternoon, watching this televangelist in my living room. For some reason, God overlooked my tantrum, and He had mercy on me. He overlooked the condition of my hardened heart, and He overlooked the evil that tried to enshroud me; He took the words that I screamed at Him – *"Heal ME!"* - and God did. I was broken, in a most literal sense, and God moved. I was literally knocked over, onto the floor, in my living room, not a violent reaction, just a gentle push that compelled my body to rest on the

floor, as if it weighed a ton. Waves of electricity flowed through me, like I was plugged into a main grid. I was fully conscious, and actually began to laugh and cry at the same time. I was laughing, because I literally couldn't move from the floor; it felt as though someone or something was holding me down. There was no fear, rather absolute peace and tranquility. After a few minutes, I was able to stumble my way into sitting upright, and it felt like I was completely inebriated. Suddenly, I noticed that I'd used my left arm to prop my body up, instead of my right arm. That was impossible, it was dead. I didn't feel any pain. I was able to move it, just as easily as my right arm. I sat there in tears, in shock, in gratitude - God did, indeed, heal me. There have been times, over the years where my own carelessness has caused more physical pain, and the symptoms have recurred, but RSD is exacerbated by stress, and it takes common sense to maintain a healing. From that day forward, I knew that God did a supernatural work in my body. I went from being able to type 60 wpm *before* my work injury, to not being able to type at all; and now – to the Glory of God - I can use both hands to touch-type 70 wpm on my good days.

Over the first two decades of my life, I had walked into so much blind deception out of my own volition and ignorance. God would later have to help me forge through some of those same doors, fighting spiritual battles

in the realm of the heavenlies until I got through to the other side, by faith in His promises to deliver me. I would learn that it was not by *my* might, or by *my* power, but by *His Spirit*, I would have victory and gain advances. This was the process of learning to surrender, of learning how to die to myself and my own selfish ambitions, to become more Christ-like in character and concentrate on God's ambitions. If there is one valuable lesson I've learned, among many over the years, it is that when we don't understand life; when we get angry with God and question Him, we are to look with humility and gratitude toward the One Whose come and gone before us... to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. ***“For we do not have a High Priest Who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but we have One Who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin. Let us then approach the Throne of Grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”*** (Hebrews 4:15-16).

The day this verse hit home for me, was the day the Lord wrote the lyrics to the first song I'd ever written. He would end up leaving me a gentle reminder if I ever needed to be brought back to my spiritual center: keeping my eyes on The Promise. Those words would be indelibly burned into my heart forever, and I would end up recalling them countless times to get me through life's tests, trials and various heartaches.

***Surrender your soul unto Me...
Surrender your will unto My Guiding Hand,
You will rise and ascend as a dove.***

***The shackles are broken... Can you feel them fall?
Beloved, the weights of your heart are now gone.***

***By My Spirit, now rise... You shall worship My Name,
By the Power of My Blood, You are washed of your stains.
You will rise and ascend from My Love.***

After God healed me in my living room, I would go on to have a succession of dreams that kept revealing the words “*open door*” and those words were written on a sign in what looked like a High School Gymnasium. It was if someone or some thing was giving me directions. I assumed it was God. A week later, I was driving, got lost on a side road, and lo and behold, my eyes were drawn to a sign that said “*Services for Open Door Held Here*”. It was a High School Gymnasium. It was here, at a Christian Missionary Alliance Church, where I would soon meet the man I thought I would marry; SB.

I have to say that I really fought the Lord in sharing this next story; I had kept the details to myself for nearly twenty years, with the exception of telling the man I actually married. I tried to reason with the Lord, justifying it with the logic that some things are better left buried in the past, because I

couldn't wrap my natural mind around how sharing it would in any way glorify my Father. To me, recounting this part of my past was pure evil, and the only redeeming thing about it, is that I survived. I had been praying, because of the subject material, that I only include relevant things that He wanted to convey, instead of me just writing out of raw emotions. This chapter was perhaps the most difficult for me to write, because while death it is inevitable, nobody likes to talk about it. The Lord was very clear to me about one thing - there is at least one person who needs to read the words written here, if only to understand one very important thing - if you don't know how to fully surrender; that is, die to yourself; you run the risk of dying emotionally, psychologically, physically, spiritually and eternally. As hard as it was to recall details to my memory and then pen it for the world to see, I now understand the logic in sharing it; it has everything to do the accountability. ***"...when a righteous man turns from his righteousness and does evil, and I put a stumbling block before him, he will die. Since you did not warn him, he will die for his sin. The righteous things he did will not be remembered, and I will hold you accountable for his blood."*** (Ezekiel 3:20).

There are those who would discount this reasoning; to stand by this verse, one is denying the Work of the Cross. I don't believe that. I believe that we

can do nothing apart from God, but God isn't required to do everything for us. We were all born with a purpose, to fulfill His Master Plan, and the Day of Judgment is closer than we all think. We have a responsibility to those around us; to share testimony in hopes it will save someone else from having to go down the same road. Having said that...

About five years before I got married, I was briefly engaged to a man who professed Christ, but was heavily bound with alcohol and drugs; he hid it very well, I didn't have a clue. I was very young in my faith, and I had met him at church. He appeared to be very spiritual, very Godly; certainly a far cry from what I was accustomed to. I was completely enamored by his charismatic personality, and became seduced by his mastery of the Word; the keyword here would be "*seduced*". I was 26, SB was 44. The age difference never mattered to me, I was always drawn to the maturity that came with having experienced life. Older men seemed to be more settled, knew what they wanted out of life, instead of haphazardly flitting from one thing to another. I learned many things through my experience with SB and thankfully, it wrought wisdom to save my own life. What I would later find out, several months into my relationship, was that I was in love with a man who chose to hide behind the Gospel out of fear of going to hell. For all the knowledge that this man boasted of, he hadn't gleaned personal knowledge

of the epitome of a Christ-centered walk. That isn't judgment talking, it was reality. ***“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, because anyone who has died, has been freed from sin.”*** (Romans 6:6-7).

SB had a dark past, indeed, and clearly he was not free from being enslaved by it. I discovered his past when I found myself held at gunpoint, by his hand. One night, he stepped totally out of character from everything I knew of him, and what manifested was nothing short of deep-seeded rage. Rape was something he knew about my past, and he promised he would never violate me in that way. Because of his actions that night, I told myself that this must've been his way of ending the relationship; that he had for some reason, grown tired of me. As he guzzled down a bottle of Scotch he'd retrieved from under his bed - to relax with - he casually opened a bedside drawer and pulled out "Tiny". Tiny was a handgun that looked like something 007 would use straight out of a James Bond movie. At first I thought it was a toy, but when he proceeded to load real bullets into the chamber, I quickly dismissed it as a play toy. My mind went into shock, I guess, and I tried to reason with him, to tell him how much I loved him. I explained that whatever it was he was so afraid of, didn't matter;

together, we would get through it. As he continued in his drunken state, playing with the loaded weapon like it was a water gun, I listened in horror as he spoke. I trembled on the inside, yet tried to keep my composure on the outside. I decided to adopt the same logic as I do with animals: never let them smell your fear, because they will always take advantage of it. It was the beginning of my own understanding of what it meant to surrender, in order to just survive.

SB was a fighter pilot with the USAF, sent into Vietnam toward the later part of the war. He told me that he saw many die by his hand while under orders. A Fifth Degree Martial Arts expert, who competed competitively before I met him, SB was quite the lethal weapon, at least in the eyes of the military. While he was in Nam, he caught the attention of a Superior Officer who allegedly needed a “job” done. He didn’t mention names, but told me that this job required him to quietly end the life of a prostitute and her pimp. From what I could gather in bits and pieces of conversation, these two individuals were threatening to jeopardize someone’s military career by exposing their alleged illicit relationship. SB was hired at ten grand a hit. Because it was a double homicide that took place in the States shortly after the war had ended, SB justified it in his mind as a war crime, but anyone thinking rationally could hardly justify premeditated murder after the fact, as

a war crime. Looking back now, he was probably suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and the psychological effects from poor choices inside a drug-induced lifestyle to maintain his love of quick cash in hand.

As SB played with Tiny, trying to screw on the silencer to its end, he told me he couldn't stand being the hypocrite he felt like; preaching, yet hiding his demons in plain sight. I got the impression that our bodies would be discovered in a pool of blood the next day with headlines reading "*shocking murder-suicide in upscale neighborhood*". I took this opportunity to make my peace with God in the midst of this spell-binding trauma, and all of a sudden, God reached down into my heart and compassion started to rise for this man. This was another step in my learning to "*die to self*". Here was a man who preached salvation and deliverance through the Gospel of Jesus Christ, all the while never truly having been set free from his past. The demons that tormented him were now manifesting in full swing and holding me hostage. It's crazy how the mind works sometimes. My thoughts at that point weren't so much geared toward the last minutes of my own life or his, as much as they were geared toward the irony of it all. It didn't make sense to me, how one could one be redeemed, as SB professed he was, know all that scripture, set other people free and still have so much fear of never being forgiven of past offenses; how he could

be saved, yet consumed with demons. Moreover, I didn't understand how or even *why* I could have any compassion whatsoever for someone who could commit atrocities that he was describing in vivid detail. He was remorseful to a certain point, but the details and the way he chose to describe them, was simply eerie. I didn't realize it then, but God was showing me a sad life lived inside of 2 Timothy 3:6; ***“one having the form of godliness, but denying its power.”*** Unfortunately for me, I would need to learn this lesson many times in life before I would finally get the message.

SB was a relatively wealthy man, and lived accordingly; had several successful businesses, although he had recently come a crossed hard times financially. I was never really drawn to the money, I can honestly say that. It was his charisma more than anything, how he expressed himself, especially his confidence in the Word. It would be nearly too late for me to discover the verse: ***“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.”*** (2 Corinthians 11:13-14). SB admitted to me that his hard times were due to a drug addiction. He told me that ten years prior, while he was in treatment that he found the Lord at The Jesus People Church, and that he was freed from drugs

instantaneously. He did say that stress made him relapse a couple of times, but never to the depths he had plummeted to before his “deliverance”. I couldn’t understand that conflicting logic, but I continued to listen and learn. I had no idea what the Jesus People Church was. All I knew was that it had Jesus in its name, so I reasoned it couldn’t have been all that bad. How naïve and foolish of me, now that I think back. I have since learned that anything having the Name of Jesus in it, begs further scrutiny. Later research would prove that JPC is, in fact, a cult, by every definition. Some ten years before we’d even met, SB was given the option to go into rehab, or do time in prison. He chose rehab under the auspices of JPC, but told me later that he only went to church to escape imprisonment. I was witnessing first-hand, his mistake; afterall, you can’t fool God. **“Do not be deceived, God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows,”** (*Galatians 6:7*). One cannot come to God out of fear of getting out of hell. Whether you try to escape hell on this earth, or in the realm to come; it just never sticks under those conditions.

I remember SB’s personalized licensed plate, “WONDER”. He always told me it was his way of “testifying to the awesome power of a Holy God”. I guess that type of talk is what kept me hooked. That, and the fact that SB had a twin brother who was a Police Sergeant in the local precinct where

he lived. SB and his family had access to many connections, including political. Having been around law enforcement most of my life, when I discovered SB's ties to the same Brotherhood, it was bittersweet for me. Because they were both Christians, in my naïveté, I thought perhaps God was redeeming my past, trying to show me there were good people on that side of the world after all. It's important to note the background, because this was a man who, literally, got away with murder twice, by his own admission. He had amassed enough knowledge to know how to kill and leave not so much as a trace of evidence behind. Added insurance was his brother, he said, who couldn't afford to lose his career. They were brothers; moreover, they were twins; they stuck together through thick and thin.

There was only one problem with SB telling me all this. He was making what felt like a death-bed confession. I didn't ask many questions; I just let him ramble on. I did not consume alcohol that night; he poured me a drink, but I let the ice water it down to nothing, and barely sipped it. That upset him, because I wouldn't party with him, and because I remained completely coherent, he knew I would remember details. I knew my life was in danger from that point forward, so I decided to make myself a scotch on the rocks, and pretend to drink it every once in awhile, acting intoxicated to gain his

allegiance. I absolutely hate the taste of Scotch, to this day, I cannot stomach its aroma; brings back too many memories. I purposely trained my mind to forget the events of this night, hoping I could reduce it to a bad nightmare.

As I write this, I think back and recall, quite frankly, more than I'd like to recall. I am old enough, however, in my faith to realize that God is just bringing back that which will open a wound long enough to expose it, and seal that door shut forever. Sometimes old wounds that lie dormant in a festering state need to be lanced to let the poison escape; then and only then can true healing begin.

SB knew he could control me with a weapon, because I was terrified of guns. He raped me, but I complied of my own volition, fearing the alternative. I just didn't have any strength left. I went into safe-mode in my brain, while at the same time, being terrorized with flashbacks of my past. After he finished his business, I lay there frozen in terror, afraid to move a muscle until I heard the empty bottle of Scotch fall from his hand, onto the floor. He didn't wake up, as it rolled along the hardwood floor, and at that point, I knew he was unconscious. I prayed he would stay that way until I was able to figure a way to sneak out of the house. Silent tears begged

God's forgiveness, wondering if He was even listening, if He even cared. I inched my way, ever so slightly off the bed, I collected my things and prayed that I would remember the code to the security system he had in place. I knew if that alarm woke him, I was dead, in a most literal sense. In his condition, he wouldn't have hesitated to pull the trigger. In fact, to this day, I can't figure out why he never did.

So much went on in the last few hours of that night, and it completely tore my trust asunder. I remembered all the other little things that gave a clue to his personality; things that I ignored. I dismissed them casually, but clearly, he had mental health issues. I felt utterly betrayed, and as if I had just slept with Satan himself. God had no reason to pay attention to my cries that night. I heard my mother's voice, "*you make your bed, you sleep in it*", so I knew that telling my parents would be an exercise in futility. My brothers would not have intervened, even if I had told them. They would've thought I was their baby sister making the whole story up to get attention. If I had gone to the police, filed a report, they would've contacted his brother and the paperwork would've been buried.

I felt I had absolutely nowhere to turn, so I turned angry. Driven by my anger, the next step I took didn't take into consideration much of the

personal consequences. Without so much as an ounce of common sensibility, I opened the fully armed door enough to squeeze myself out, knowing full well I would set it off. I didn't care. SB never woke up and the alarm never went off. I got in my car and sped away to a few blocks down the road at three in the morning, and just sat there and cried. I don't even know how I made it home, to be honest. It would take me years before I found the scripture verse that might've explained my escape that night, ***“he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.”*** (1 Corinthians 3:15). I guess God heard my cries after all.

When SB called me the next morning, he was completely normal, and as jovial in spirit as one could be, praising the Lord for a brand new day. I was completely baffled, thinking he might be schizophrenic. I finally put two and two together to make four. He had blacked out, and thankfully, he had no recollection of me ever being there; another miracle to my favor. This eerie conversation convinced me that I needed to do everything within my power to destroy this relationship; keywords: *“my power”*. I figured if I could get him to break it off with me, I would be safer because it would appear to him that he remained in control. SB's world and everyone surrounding it was at peace when he felt he was in control. Two weeks later, that's exactly what

happened; he ended it. I fell apart for the umpteenth time, vacillating between my grief over another loss, and gratefulness that it was over. My hopes and dreams were dashed and smashed to pieces. I had fallen so deeply in love, and I couldn't wrap my mind around that fact that I had given my life to Christ, believing I was on a new walk with God; believing for a Christ-centered relationship with a man, and this was all God wanted to give me in exchange for my trusting Him? It just didn't mesh. I hadn't a clue what it meant to live inside Matthew 24 – through the false signs and wonders. Clearly, I made poor choices with this man, but, as a new believer, I was easily manipulated, especially when scripture was in play. My logic at the time was that love truly is blind when you love someone, and you tend to give them the benefit of every doubt; you will believe anything if it sounds the least bit plausible.

I couldn't understand how a loving Father could allow it to escalate to the point it did, meaning marriage, when I stood on the Word that says, ***"...those who put their hope in the Lord will not be disappointed"***, (*Isaiah 49:23*). I would come to understand how much God grieved over my choices, and that His mercy would have to allow for discipline in order that I might comprehend all that verse entails.

Perhaps it wouldn't have hit me so hard, had I not been dealing with a physical disability at the time of this breakup. Because of my work-related injury, I was on leave of absence, almost the entire time I was with SB. I felt utterly worthless, and when he told me he didn't want anymore liabilities, I knew he meant that I was a liability. Even though I knew that ending things was in the best interest for me down the road, the condemning voices in my head were so loud that I couldn't hear much of anything else. My self-esteem was at an all time low; I took everything personally, and I felt personally rejected, as a woman. It would take several years for me to realize that, though I suffered heartache, it was nothing short of angelic intervention that protected me in my own natural and spiritual ignorance with this man.

SB ended up marrying someone else two short weeks after we broke up, while they were both drunk and under the influence of cocaine and alcohol. A quick trip to Vegas, a couple of lines of cocaine and a bottle of Scotch was all it took for him to destroy what little was left of his life. While SB went on with his life, I would go on to experience the grief of eight successive deaths while still dealing with the physical pain of my work-injury. Six of those deaths would take place in my own family. God would use this time to allow me hit rock-bottom. Though I couldn't see it at the

time, this is what was transpiring, “... ***Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.***” (Luke 22:31-32).

People in my life were dropping like dominos. Every thirty days, there was another funeral to attend, or condolence to make; it was simple tragic and out of everyone’s control. The deaths in my family were all, ironically, on my mother’s side of the gene pool, and she refused to attend any of the funerals because she had been estranged from her family for years; she wouldn’t allow her children to attend either – some of us did without her knowledge. The first death was an uncle, my mother’s brother-in-law, who died of cancer within weeks of his initial diagnosis. One month later, another uncle, also her brother-in-law, died of cirrhosis of the liver and prostate cancer. One month after that, another uncle, my mother’s youngest brother, was cutting down some trees on his farm, and a branch fell from above him, from the vibrations of his chainsaw. He lost his footing on the ladder, and tried to recover when a large branch came down like a spear into one eye and out the other side of his brain. Uncle Bobby died after spending several weeks in a coma. One month after that, the first aunt, my mother’s sister, who suffered the loss of her husband to cancer,

got news that her middle daughter, her son-in-law and her two grandchildren were in a head-on collision with a semi. Only the youngest grand-daughter survived.

A couple of months later would bring the news of my best friend in High School, Bob. I didn't find out about his tragic death until three months after the funeral had already taken place. I had moved and lost touch with old friends, and they couldn't find me. Bob was riding his motorcycle without a helmet; he was under the influence of a controlled substance, he lost control of the vehicle on wet pavement, went into a skid at a high rate of speed, was flung into the air - decapitated by a barbed wire fence in the distance.

And like clock-work, one month later, my only Christian friend, Ellie, finally succumbed to lymphoma. I credit Ellie for being the one responsible for initially ushering me into the Presence of God. I befriended her for several months before she passed, and spent every waking hour caring for her, doing her shopping, her cooking. I had to keep my mind off my own problems. I wasn't working, I was in constant pain, but I'm not one to sit around and do nothing. Ellie would spend hours and hours upon hours, talking about the Lord and her anticipated death. She was at such peace,

knowing the inevitable, yet not allowing fear to consume her. I'd never met anyone like Ellie. She was the one who explained the Kingdom of Heaven to me, and essentially prepared me for the deaths that would soon occur in my own family. Her faith in God, and her knowledge of scripture made me hunger for more. It was never boring with Ellie; Jesus Christ seemed so real to her, as if He was sitting in the same room with us every time we talked. I know now, that He was, but back then, I hadn't a clue. All I knew was that in the midst of her incredible pain, there was incredible peace. And it wasn't the smell of cancer in her apartment, but a fragrance of something my senses had never experienced before, and it was nothing I could compare it to until I found this verse: ***“For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.”*** (2 Corinthians 2:15)

Ellie was the one that would end up telling me about the stories in the Book of Job, the losses that he suffered, yet still worshipped God in their midst. When Ellie told me the story, I had just received the tragic news of my best friend, Bob. I felt like Job, only I couldn't worship God like Job did. I fell apart. A month later, Ellie died. Months of patience that this precious saint of God spent tilling in the garden of my heart, planting seeds into my life prepared me, on a subconscious level, for when death would try to

devastate my faith as a new believer. When uncles, cousins, my best friend throughout High School, and my finally, my dear sweet Ellie, who was like a mother to me and my only Christian friend at the time, fell like dominos within what seemed like a blink of an eye, God wrapped His Word around me, and comforted me in a way that is still, to this day, remarkably indescribable. I was still angry with Him for taking away people that I loved, yet God held me close, and never let go. He would provide opportunities to help me draw from His Word for strength, but He would never push; He always let it be my choice.

I had nobody else, no real friends just to hang out with, but that was by my choice. I listened to the voice of fear tell me that anyone I grew close to would eventually be taken from me. I felt cursed. I became desolate in spirit. I was so filled with agony and confusion and grief, I craved that *one* touch from God that would make it all better. At the height of my faith, reaching high for that one touch, I would study the Word for hours on end, and it would consume me for several months. I went to every Camp Meeting I could find, I prayed that God would give me “every good and perfect gift from above”, and for the first time in my life, there was some semblance of order in my life. That is, until one day, my past resurfaced. I had a dream that SB would try to contact me, and sure enough, two days

would pass and he did, in the wee hours of the morning. God had prepared me in my dream with this scripture verse, and I clung to it: ***“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.”*** (1 Corinthians 10:13).

SB was, indeed, my biggest temptation. He would go on to torment me for the better part of next year, and because I was still afraid of him, though trying to convince myself I wasn't, I was in fact, intimidated by his threats of *“hunting me down like a rabid dog and killing me”*. I struggled with my own insecurities, and felt so incredibly alone and vulnerable. I knew God was there, but my faith hadn't developed to the point where I no longer cared for companionship from another human being. Fear broke down my defenses and I unfortunately succumbed. The enemy convinced me that I had nowhere to turn. Again, there was God, but it seemed He would rip away anyone or anything I tried to connect to, and I didn't understand so much of scripture; I was still learning. Trying to recover from the chaos that flowed through my life like a waterfall falling into tumultuous rapids beneath, grief and desperation finally took their toll. Albeit twisted, I used logic to justify re-connecting with SB. I wanted him gone from my life; only I couldn't

make him go away. I knew conversing with him was dangerous, but part of me didn't care. I prayed religiously that the torment in my mind would come to an end, but it only seemed to escalate. While I never allowed him to entertain an extramarital affair with me, he kept pressing for one because he found himself in a literal hell with his new bride. Thankfully, God kept me from entertaining that realm of horror with him.

SB claimed that he wanted to quit the drugs and get clean, but his wife was apparently a worse addict than he was. I became the classic co-dependent, enabling this sad and out of order relationship, but I reasoned it away as acceptable if it would net positive results: to hold him accountable for his crimes. He would call in the wee hours of the morning, every other month, like clock work, and always when he was drunk. Every thirty days, death manifesting in some sort would come knocking on the door of my heart, and deep sorrowful grief would always follow.

I would just be on the verge of healing from the last conversation, vowing never to allow it again, and like a well-oiled machine, the dials would spin and it would happen again. This continued for the better part of eight more months. I kept letting the messages pile up on my answering machine. I only answered a few times when I thought he was truly suicidal; he knew

he had me wrapped around his little finger. By this time, though, I had mastered the art of wiretap for personal use, and that gave me a bit of security, inasmuch as one could call it that. I knew it would one day provide me leverage. One message he left on my machine, begged me to speak with him, because he said he felt like he was falling deeper and deeper into hell. Apparently, the sound of my voice found him, as he would say, *"in the hollow of God's hand"*. One night he called for a different reason. He wanted me to pray for his new bride. She had been diagnosed with a malignant tumor inside her uterus; she was scheduled for a hysterectomy in the morning. Like a magic wand, I was summoned to pray away his troubles. I couldn't believe my ears. He was in bed with his wife; she was in an unconscious state from getting wasted on alcohol, apparently this was her way of preparing for surgery in the morning. She had small children, and I knew SB was not equipped to deal with them alone. He didn't like kids that much, had two grown children of his own that he hadn't seen in years. I feared for her children's safety, knowing all I knew about him. I often wondered if she knew as many details of his life, as I did.

I remember dropping to my knees in utter despair over my own devastating grief; how much more did God want from me? I listened to SB say that

God was punishing him for the way he treated me, and now God was going to kill his wife and leave him alone in his agony as payback for his past sins. It was such a sick conversation. I sat there, with silent tears streaming down my face. I wasn't good enough to marry, but I was good enough to pray for the woman who stole the man I once loved. Funny how the mind works.

In that forty-five minute conversation, I couldn't stand the agony in my heart. I finally agreed to pray. I felt a surge of heat emanate through my body as I picked up my Bible. I slid down to the floor, against the living room wall in my apartment, in my pajamas, and opened it blindly. This verse jumped off the page: ***“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.”*** (James 5:16). I began to tremble. Tearfully, I prayed. I prayed that her children would be able to keep their mother, and that God would dissolve the mass and she wouldn't have to lose her uterus. I asked the Lord to forgive SB for every vile thing he ever did to me, and I asked for forgiveness for my stupidity. All I could do was cry, and hysterically at that. SB tried to tell me he was sorry, but his words meant nothing to me. I asked God to do a miracle, for the sake of this woman's children, because I wanted children and a husband so

badly. My way of “sowing seeds”, you could call it. By this time, I had been familiar with the verse about mocking God. I knew I would one day reap what I sowed. I gave God the only sacrifice of praise I could think of; I prayed for SB’s wife. I know now, that this was the day I died to myself.

I received a phone call just a few hours later, at 830 in the morning; it was SB. They had prepared his wife for a hysterectomy, but he had insisted on another set of x-rays be taken. The doctors were perplexed; there was no indication of a tumor. They opened her up, and there was nothing there. He was so excited, his wife had been healed. I sat on the other end of the phone in shock, totally speechless. I wish I could say that I rejoiced over her healing, but I was too absorbed in self-pity. I say that to my shame, but it was the truth. She would go on to live a life with him, probably prosper in the process, and I was left alone. It wasn’t fair. I wallowed in tears for the better part of the day, and then by 4pm I decided to take all the phone conversations I had accumulated, and put them on a two hour tape. I made a copy for myself, and I hand-delivered one to SB’s twin brother at his place of employment; he was now further up in the Law Enforcement echelon, and I knew he definitely couldn’t afford a personal scandal. I told him if he didn’t find a way to keep his brother away from me, I would take the tape to Internal Affairs, since at least three of the conversations, SB

would implicate him as an accomplice in covering up various alleged crimes he committed, including the cold case of the double homicide. I even went so far to type up a transcript, complete with date, time and second stamps, so that he could fast-forward and cue up the tape to the specific conversations. When SB's read the transcript, and I put the copy of micro-cassette in his hand, he turned white as a sheet. I have to admit, it took a lot of guts to walk up to an officer of the law, fully dressed with cuffs and loaded weapon, but I'm not sorry I did. I was done being intimidated, done being manipulated and done with the torment. I told him his sister-in-law had been healed, and about the recent conversation with his brother. I looked him square in the eye and demanded insurance that it the tormenting phone calls would come to an end.

There is a certain courage one can muster when they are sick and tired of being sick and tired. And that's how I felt – sick and tired. SB's brother didn't take me seriously, until I told him the name of his brother's alias; how people who needed "jobs" done, would contact him; what phone number they would call and where the secret meeting places were for various drug connections. SB liked to hunt with bows, hence a clue to one of his aliases. SB told me he liked to hunt with bows for one reason only: because they were stealth and *"the hunted never know you're there until*

it's too late." I was never so terrified in my life to give that tape to his brother, but adrenaline kept my courage and held my head up high. It was my way of defeating fear... and winning. God was with me, of that I am certain, but I'm sure heaven was working overtime as I operated in my own flesh.

Every time I would have a dream about SB, and wake up in a cold sweat, remembering that night and hearing his last words to me, *"if you ever tell, I will hunt you down like a rabid dog and kill you"*, God would always whisper the same thing, *"peace be still, vengeance is Mine"*. On my seventh wedding anniversary, I had another dream. I told my husband in tears and in vivid detail, everything about SB, as we sat on our porch swing in the back yard. I asked him what he would do if SB ever came to hurt me. The dreams were always incredibly violent and I shared them with my husband in hopes of having his arms wrapped around me, to comfort me. I will never forget his words for as long as I live. He thought about my question for a minute and simply said. *"I guess I would ride out the storm and believe God for restoration"*. That's all my husband of seven years could say to me, and then he had the audacity to get upset with me for the tears and anger I displayed in my response. This was my anniversary, and this was all he could come up with. That would explain why he was always

watching on the sideline of my repeating dreams, with his arms folded, just like a spectator, while I was being violently assaulted. For years I would suffer, looking over my shoulder, wondering... and now I didn't even have the protection I thought a husband was supposed to offer a wife. That night I went to bed and God tried to comfort me, I heard the words "*vengeance is mine, saith the Lord, I will repay.*" I can't tell you exactly what that meant, but I can tell you what transpired. The recurring dreams suddenly stopped; like SB's phone conversations during that tormenting year, the dreams would come about every other month the entire time I was married. The night of my seventh anniversary, things changed, and the dreams stopped.

I would come to discover several years later, only after I had separated from my marriage, that SB committed suicide while under the care of a mental health facility for drug treatment in another state, just a couple of short years after my dreams stopped. Even though I hadn't been around him in years, when I discovered the news, I didn't gloat over his demise. I grieved for him, mourned over the loss of his existence. I wondered what I could've done differently to change the course of his life, and didn't. SB died a free man, as far as the world is concerned; that is, he was never convicted of his crimes, was never incarcerated in prison, but he died bound in the worst prison of all: his shattered mind. I wanted him gone

from my life, but I never wished him dead. There is nothing quite like the finality of death to put life into perspective and give you a healthy fear of the Lord. God sees everything and when I found this verse, I developed a new fear of God, “... ***the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear Him, on those whose hope is in His unfailing love, to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine.***” (Psalm 33:18-19)

God would use SB and that entire part of my life to prove to me that prayer was my only defense against fear. My trusting in God’s Divine Intervention was the only way my soul could find peace. Time will tell if SB was truly saved; if God took him Home to his final rest, if he came to repentance and returned to God before his last breath. One might presume the answer to be no, but I’ve seen too much in my lifetime to make that judgment call. Only God knows what transpired in the last few seconds of his life. We know what happened to the thief on the cross; Jesus saw beyond his vileness and redeemed him. Clearly SB lived in hell on this earth. I don’t know if the cold cases of these two individuals were, or will ever be solved, but I know one day, he will be held accountable in the Court of Heaven.

I wanted to end this chapter with a wonderful testimony of my own father. He surrendered his soul to the Lord late in life, or so it appeared, and he

went Home New Years Day, 2003. My father, Roscoe, had to have been a man of great faith to endure all the years of hardship he experienced, but it wasn't until the last few years of his life, that he would openly talk about the Lord. I believe God kept his heart, even when he would act like things were within his own power. I think, in that way, he and his youngest daughter - that would be me – we're a great deal alike. God had a definite purpose for my father's life. I used to think that my own life had little worth, because I'd spent most of it walking blindly through a desert of emotional land mines. By the time I got to the other side, nearly all of me was either maimed or left for dead. Until I saw how God had orchestrated my father's Home coming, I didn't realize how the things we do in this life, mattered to God.

My father served in World War II, and was part of a reconnaissance unit in the liberation of Jews from the Landsberg Concentration Camp, just outside of Dachau. He saw first-hand, the atrocities of the Jewish Holocaust. He saw the bodies piled up, ready to burn in the incinerators; he smelled the overwhelming stench of death from decomposing bodies. He saw the gas chambers, the inhumane barracks, and the tonnage of clothing, shoes, glasses and personal effects of those slain. He saw the remains of countless thousands in open graves; bodies stacked upon each other in

mangled heaps, and saw the horrors of the prisoners that were nothing but “walking corpses with skin stretched over skeletons”, as I recall him saying. My father would talk about the war, only when prodded. He said it was too horrific to even mutter. When I browse through the Holocaust Museum even today, and see men who were liberators of concentration camps, just like my father, I cannot imagine the level of grace God needed to give these men, in order to fulfill their military obligations. To see such crimes against humanity is overwhelming to me, even to this day. To me, my father was a hero, and while he suffered horribly in the last five years of his life under conditions that are, frankly, too painful to write, God made his Home-coming one of honor, and it was a glorious testament to a Heavenly Father’s faithfulness. God gave me memories of my father that I would otherwise have never known, and He did it to ease the pain of not having him here on earth.

For my family, however, my father’s passing was an extremely traumatic event, as any death is; but they were ones without the knowledge of Jesus Christ, so they suffered far worse in their grief than I ever did. They knew *of* Jesus, but they didn’t have a clue *Who* He was on a personal level; there is a big difference between the two. The death of my father, and how I envisioned responding to his passing, having been tormented as a child for

years at over the mere thought of losing of a parent, was unlike anything I could've ever anticipated. It was God, Who was faithful to carry me through, provide incredible strength, and uncanny opportunities to stand in awe of His All-encompassing Sovereignty. Because of God's incredible grace, I responded to my father's passing with an ironic and unexpected joy in my heart. I cried for him, but not out of missing him, as much as I cried with grateful tears of a faithful God who was rewarding my father for time well served. At my father's last breath, an angel of the Lord extended his hand, and ushered him into Glory.

I always thought, when Christians said stuff like that, that it had to be pretense, denial, or at best, pious religiosity; that they were somehow brainwashed into believing that their grief was just another opportunity to guilt people into the Kingdom of Heaven. Before I understood death through the eyes of My Father, I thought their feelings of joy were sadistic, a mask hiding incredible pain that was so terrible, they were afraid to show their real emotions. For some, that may still be true, but I received an incredible revelation through watching my father pass onto the next part of Eternity, and I have experienced first-hand, this unexplainable joy. I was not experiencing happiness, but I would come to know the joy of the Lord, from my innermost depths, and it would become my strength. I

experienced a glimpse of what Job felt when he lost everything important to him, and yet was able to utter the words, “***...though you slay me, yet will I hope in you...***” (Job 13:15). While we cannot praise God *for* the circumstances surrounding death, we can learn to praise God *in the midst* of them, and look for the little miracles He provides to strengthen and encourage us when life makes no sense. In my opinion, there is no other way through.

The day my father died, I woke up from a dream I was having about him. My father was in a ten by ten square, padlocked prison, almost like a cage one would keep a zoo animal in, and it was placed on the sand of a beach, about 30 feet from an ocean. I saw the ebb and flow of the gentle tide. My father was digging his way underground with his hands, trying to tunnel his way out under the cage, to run to the ocean and swim to safety. Seeing this, I wanted to run to him and help, but I was not allowed to participate in my dream, only observe from a distance. In my dream, I prayed to the Lord to release him from the tormenting illness that he suffered from all of his pain, to send an angel to break down the prison doors and set him free. I opened the Bible I found appearing in my hand, to this verse: ***“I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a***

light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.”

(Isaiah 42:6-7). Thirty seconds later, I was awakened from my dream with the telephone ringing. It was my sister informing me that our father had just taken his last breath about three minutes before she called me. She was alone with him, and had been reading all through the Book of Psalms. He passed away peacefully in the middle of Psalm 96 at 1:43 in the morning. She said she saw an angel descend from heaven over his head to take our father Home; that there was such tremendous peace, she didn't want to leave.

The last couple of days before his death, I would witness something extraordinary; the week that would pass in preparation for his funeral arrangements were even more amazing. It is a story worth repeating through generations, because it is an almost surreal account of the compassion of God that undeniably proves His very Existence. There is not an agnostic, or atheist in the world, who could explain the events that unfolded at my father's passing. They were nothing short of miraculous. My father was not a rich man, he was not politically connected, there was nothing about him that anyone would call him esteemed, yet God honored him. He was just a simple carpenter who loved his work. Even though my

father was no longer cognizant of his surroundings in this world, the Lord, through Divine Appointments, would make sure that at least several of us would never forget. It is my great honor to now put this story into print for the world to read. Some might call the events that transpired a coincidence; but I know in my heart that only Supernatural Intervention could've caused this chain of events, for the sole purpose of proving the Sovereignty and faithfulness of God.

I was quietly praying in my prayer tongue alongside one of my sisters and the Hospital Chaplain, over my father's bedside as he lie comatose, just a couple of days before his impending death. He was in a morphine-induced coma because he was so racked with pain, and his organs were shutting down one against the other. There were no natural words to pray at this point, my father was on his way out of this world, and his passing was inevitable. Because of the pain and his misery on this earth for so many years, I prayed that God would take him quickly. You could see death all over his face. As we prayed collectively, we saw a collective vision, and each part was like a puzzle piece we would put together later to tell a wonderful story. We discovered this phenomenon shortly after the nurse came into the ICU to take vital signs and asked if we would come back in a few minutes.

The Hospital Chaplain and I took that opportunity to sit down in the waiting room and have a cup of coffee while we talked. I mentioned to her, that while I was praying, I had a vision. I saw what can only be described as a slide show of my father's life, as a soldier in World War II. My father never really talked about the war, except a few small details and to say that it was the worst assault on a psyche that a human could suffer. My mother would never allow him to talk about it, but I remember as a little girl, him screaming in his dreams. I recall my mother telling him over breakfast how he lashed out at her while he was sleeping. He had no memory of his nightmares, but they were frequent. He was one tormented soul for all the years of his life that I can remember. My mother said he had nightmares nearly every night since coming home from the war, up until the day he was taken by ambulance to the hospital for the final time.

As I clasped my father's hand into mine, and prayed in my prayer language, I began to see moving pictures; horrible pictures of corpses in mass graves, piled ten to fifteen bodies high, one after the other after the other; American GI's collecting bodies, pulling survivors out from the decomposing bodies piled on top of them. I saw GI's piling bodies onto amphibious vehicles; I saw others help the prisoners escape from barbed

wire fencing, there was chaos everywhere. It was so painful to watch. I opened my eyes when the pictures I was seeing in my mind's eye, were too hard to look at. I opened my eyes to look at my father's face, all pasty white, his lifeless little body lying on the bed, just a whisper away from Eternity; his life was being drained from his body. It looked as though my father was seeing the same things I was seeing... pictures of his life, flash before his eyes. His face would grimace, tears would drip down from his eyes, he would moan and groan, and then there would be a moment or two of peace, and then more emotions would display on his face as if he were reliving the entire experience. I cried so hard for him, I'd never seen my father express his emotions in this way, and here he was, comatose and hours from death, and was finally able to release them. I know that the three of us praying helped him to grieve for the years he couldn't. When I wiped his tears, I saw something else in my mind's eye; I saw him leaning over bodies and praying peace over them. I saw him break down emotionally, with other soldiers, over the atrocities, and weep over the injustice done to them. I also saw prisoners in the distance watching my father pray over the bodies. It was a remarkable vision. Suddenly, a scripture came to my mind, ***“if you have done it unto the least of these, My Brethren, you've done it unto Me.”*** (Matthew 25:40)

While my sister was out of the room, the Hospital Chaplain told me that she was just the itinerate Chaplain, just filling in for that evening. She told me that, as she prayed, she had a similar vision, of my father praying and blessing the souls of the slain. And then she told me something that was too remarkable to be a coincidence. She was Jewish by heritage, and had come to discover Jesus as her Messiah several years prior. She asked where my father was stationed in Germany, and to which camp he was assigned to liberate. I told her that it was a camp somewhere near Dachau. She began to cry. She had been visiting with her Grandmother about a month beforehand. They were discussing the Holocaust. Her Grandmother was a survivor of Dachau, but her Grandfather hadn't survived. She had moved to the United States some years later and gave birth to a son, who happened to be this Chaplain's Father. There were stories that her Grandmother would tell of the American GI's who liberated them, and how touched she was, as a Jew, to know that a Gentile was praying peace over the departed souls. As this Chaplain spoke, the Presence of the Lord was so intense; it was as if a Cloud of Glory had filled the room. We embraced one another and shared tears, and God was embracing us with His Presence. My father had prayed for someone who could've easily been this woman's Grandfather. While mere logic might think that was impossible, what would transpire over the next week in

preparation for my father's funeral, would make this assumption completely plausible.

To help lift the burden from my brother, who I was estranged from at the time, I pleaded with him to allow me to do my father's Memorial. En-route to my father's Memorial Service from another state where I lived, I walked into a copy place to enlarge a picture of my father in his military dress uniform. I had created a scrapbook of his medals and accomplishments, and had intended to put the finishing touches on his Memorial. I was having a terrible time with the color copier, nothing would work right. I was low on cash, my impatient and tired children were with my soon-to-be ex-husband – we had driven into town together since he was asked to be a Paul Bearer - and I was still very much grieving over the death of my father. Even though we were separated, I made the decision to put our differences aside so that our children could have a decent memory of their Grandfather's passing. The grace of God kept me from falling to pieces. I was getting very frustrated by my fifth attempt to operate the color copier, so I finally went up for help.

The young lady behind the counter, who couldn't have been any older than 18, offered her assistance. She could tell I'd been crying, she smiled as

she brought to my attention the mascara streaks I'd missed just before walking in the door. She asked how she could help and I gave her my father's picture to enlarge. She looked as though she'd seen a ghost. I asked her why she was taken aback by his photograph. She noticed the memorial with my father's picture, the date and the unit my father was assigned to, and she said *"Oh my gosh! I know this man!"* Perplexed, I knew she had to be mistaken, she wasn't old enough; she could've been my own daughter. I told her it was my father; that he probably looked like someone she knew. She insisted that this was the man her Great-grandfather spoke of just two weeks prior to my meeting her. She was visiting her Great-grandfather, and they were going through old WWII pictures for a scrapbook she was making for him. She said he pulled out a picture of himself, standing next to my father. She recognized him straight away. I asked what the name of her Great-grandfather's platoon was and where he was stationed, and she said, *"that's the funny thing, it's the same as your dad, they must've been friends...isn't that cool?"* We both looked at each other in somewhat of a shock. How could this be? Her Great-grandfather operated the amphibious vehicles that served as transport, and my father was one of many soldiers that gathered thousands of bodies of the holocaust victims. Together they worked to give these poor souls a decent burial, along with other GI's in their unit. Mass graves didn't give

much in the way of decency, but this girl said that her Great-grandfather remembered my father because he would pray over the bodies he found and ask forgiveness for what was done to them; asking God to bless their departed souls. They would weep together and her Great-grandfather would tell her many sad stories. I never knew that about my dad. He hardly ever talked about God unless he was prodded, and even then, he wouldn't say much.

I just stood there, leaned up against the copier and began to weep as she spoke. I knew she was telling the truth. She couldn't have been making it all up, why would anybody do that? She couldn't have known details if it were not the truth. The same feeling I had in the hospital at my father's bedside, I had right there in the middle of the copy store. The girl started to tear up and could barely keep her composure. I was already in an emotional state and I couldn't hold it together after that. I asked if she was a believer, and she said both she and her Great-grandfather were. The tears I cried were over the sheer grace of God, and how He cared enough to allow me the opportunities to meet these two women; two strangers, one hospital chaplain and one little copy girl, from generations apart, among billions of people on the planet. He placed them divinely placed in my path, and I would understand how small this world really is. Both of these sisters

in Christ gave me memories that I will cherish forever.

Death, whether it is physical, or emotional, brings us in closer communion with God. Whatever circumstance brings death, God offers Life in return. Death ushers us past the Outer Court, into The Holy Place. We pass the Brazen Altar and for those of us who know God intimately – those who have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ – death allows us to finally behold Him face-to-face. Physical death takes us beyond the Veil, into The Heavenly Tabernacle of God Himself. When we lose people we love, one of our knee-jerk reactions is to think about how we will live life without them; and we inadvertently make their death about us, instead of about them. We need to realize that, especially for the Believer in Christ, that God is blessing them with their reward in Heaven for time well-served here on this earth. Sometimes, I believe, God takes the innocent and spares them from a life of trials.

Whatever the circumstance or reason, we need to know that God is the Giver and ultimate Taker of life. He has pre-ordained each day, and has calibrated the very air we will consume in our lifetime. When our loved ones depart from us, either anticipated through a long illness, or taken unexpectedly, God is the One Who is in ultimate control; we are just

collateral damage along the way. If we don't believe in the Sovereignty of God over the circumstance, we remain lost in hopelessness. Believing in God's Sovereignty, helps to take the focus off our grief, and helps us to realize that God is not punishing us by removing those we love; He is simply re-uniting with His creation in the most intimate way – He is bringing them Home, to His Bosom. To those who have washed their robes in the righteousness of Christ, they have entered the gates of the city of God. ***“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in Me. In My Father's House, there are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with Me that you may also be where I am.”*** (John 14:1-3)

***Surrender your soul unto Me...
Surrender your will unto My Guiding Hand,
You will rise and ascend as a dove.***

***The shackles are broken... Can you feel them fall?
Beloved, the weights of your heart are now gone.***

***By My Spirit, now rise... You shall worship My Name,
By the Power of My Blood, You are washed of your stains.
You will rise and ascend from My Love.***

Surrendering your soul – your mind, your will, and your emotions – to God,

is the only way you will be able to find Joy Unceasing. It is the only way you will be able to tap into His Strength when you have none of your own, and it is the only way to find the peace that passes all understanding. True Joy comes when a person comes into actual fellowship with God. We can know certain truths; that God loves us, and that we are related to Him through Jesus Christ, but when this revelation sinks down into our souls and doctrines we've heard become our own experiences, this is where true Joy is birthed. When we walk continually and habitually with God, there is a joy that is indescribable by every worldly definition. He will make known to us our path in life, and He will fill us with the Joy in His Presence, (*Psalm 16:11*). When our minds become fixed in His Presence, there will be fullness of Joy; and to those whose mind is unwaveringly stayed on God's promises, there will be perfect peace, (*Isaiah 26:3*). Joy and peace walk hand-in-hand and this is what gives you strength. ***“He gives power to the faint, and to them that have no might, he increases strength.”*** (*Isaiah 40:29*)

People who possess *“the joy of the Lord”* find it is in His strength that they are fortified against temptation. Joy is the sign that life has found its purpose and its reason for being. This is a revelation that can only come from God, nobody can tell you what that is; He must reveal it to you

Himself, for no one can come to God and find their purpose in life, unless God first calls them, and then reveals it to them. Until we come to the point in our faith that we are confident of God's Presence in our life, that He is our Providence; that He has provided in the past and will certainly maintain His provision in our present and our future, we will not be able to experience the fullness of His Joy. If we seek joy it as the world does, it will be short-lived; it will be temporal. But if we seek Biblical Joy, we shall come to know it as fruit; something that has its roots deeply buried in the realization of God's purpose that will eventually transform us into His Image, (*1 Corinthians 13:12*). When tragedy strikes us, there is a Joy that is set before us; we just have to keep our eyes focused on what we can't see, and not to the circumstances we can see. We need to look beyond our grief, to the hope of the good that God intends to transpire from it. We need to remember that in our weakness, God's power is perfect, that He will strengthen us, He will equip us, and He will show us the higher purpose in and through it. He will saturate us with His mercy and His grace, and He will indeed, ***"...give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified."*** (*Isaiah 61:3*)

When we surrender ourselves to the wisdom of His understanding, God will take us by the hand, and walk us through to our destinies, in the midst of His work - the restoration to our souls. He will be faithful to reveal His Joy Unceasing.