

A photograph of a man in a light blue shirt lifting a young girl in a blue patterned dress into the air. They are outdoors near a body of water at sunset, with mountains in the background. The scene is warm and joyful, with the sun low on the horizon creating a lens flare effect.

Getting Over Depression

**The testimony of someone who wanted to give up,
but God wouldn't let him.**

Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

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Introduction

This book is an account of my life experiences and the feelings that accompanied them. I think you'll discover that, although my situations might be different from yours, you may have experienced similar emotions and thoughts. Emotions and thoughts that might be destroying your very life – and that of your family's.

During my depression I thought I was the only one who felt or thought the way I did, and was unable to share those feelings with others. Be assured you're not the only one, as you'll soon discover as I show you the way I viewed life and the consequences of that view.

I will share my journey of recovery from a man who continually wanted to end his life to a man who can't wait to see what wonderful things tomorrow will bring. I can now look at the past that used to haunt me in ways that bring me peace. I now see that everything really does happen for a reason. I also have learned how our lives affect those around us.

If you're reading this book, you're reading it for a reason, one you may not be aware of yet. Something you'll read here will help you or someone you know or love, receive the gift of peace.

Mark Buckley

Chapter 1

A Beautiful Day

I woke up to the sun shining on my face through the window. It was another beautiful morning in Southern California. I went out on the balcony and looked out to see neighboring homes with well manicured yards each accented with a variety of shrubs and plants. I looked down to see my own yard and the walkway, which had roses of different colors bordering it. The sun glistened off the dew so brightly I had to squint to see. I went inside to get ready for my journey. I shaved, brushed my teeth and took a shower and selected the clothes I would wear for that day. I went downstairs to the kitchen to grab something to eat before I left. I took a bagel from the refrigerator and placed it in the toaster to brown. While I was waiting I went to the side door to admire my handy work in the yard from the week before. I trimmed back the bushes that had become overgrown and cleaned up the beds of unwanted weeds. After my bagel popped up from the toaster I spread a generous portion of my favorite cream cheese over the top and proceeded to go to the back door. I went out through the sliding glass door to my deck and went past my hot tub to the railing. The hill in my backyard was in full bloom of bright red flowers and the trees on the top made the perfect fence, giving me seclusion from the outside world. Today was going to be a very special day for me, I've been planning a trip to my favorite place, the Cove at La Jolla, for six days. The Cove at La Jolla is where I fell in love with California about sixteen months earlier and was the reason I decided California was going to be my new home.

Since I moved to California I had taken several trips to that special place, but this morning my trip to La Jolla was going to be different as I embarked alone. I decided to take the scenic route on the coast highway. With my windows down and my sun roof opened I enjoyed the sun and the wind as it filled my car. I enjoyed going through the small towns

looking at the shops and people walking on the sidewalks. I reached one of my favorite spots where the road winds up on top of a mountain and you can look down and see the coastline for miles on a clear day. I watched in amazement while enjoying the fragrance of the salt air. I passed several white sandy beaches that had dozens of surfers heading out to the cool water to catch a wave before work. There wasn't a cloud in the sky and the bright blue reflected of the water like a mirror. I chose the perfect day to end my life.

Yes, that is what I'd been planning for the last six days. I took a couple of items: a bottle of water and an empty container of M&M's filled with an anti-depressant called Parnate. I was truly excited and relieved about my final trip to the cove. In my own way I said good-bye to my wife, son and daughter. None of them knowing of my final trip. It was an early Monday morning so the cove wasn't very busy and I was able to find a choice spot close to the water. It was a smooth flat rock with no one near-by; it was as if I had the whole beach to myself. I sat down on the rock and placed my bottle of water next to me. I sat for a while enjoying the great view I had, listening to the waves and the birds flying over the water. I thought to myself today will be the day all the hurting ends and a peace came over me. I wasn't nervous, only relieved that this terrible thing, I called life, was about to end.

I was raised in Ohio most of my life, and several years ago I visited California. I was at the cove in La Jolla, and I felt as if something was calling me. I just stood there for over an hour looking out over the ocean, and I finally figured out why I was so depressed. I wasn't living in California! Boy, that was easy. Without preparation and just on an impulse I moved six months later. Well, for some reason, things still weren't going right and less than a year later I found myself without a job, and on the verge of losing my home. One day I decided it would be for the best for everyone if I was no longer here. I remember waking up in the morning and

despising the reflection I saw in the mirror to the point I would talk to myself and tell myself what a terrible person I was. I didn't even try to defend myself from me. I took a bottle of pills that should have been more than enough to do the job, and headed back to the beach where I fell in love with California. This is now my fifth or sixth suicide attempt. The first one I hired someone to kill me (the person went to the wrong place), another was by electrocution (a phone call stopped me at the last moment), shoot myself (someone stopped me and found the gun, and a couple of overdoses (not quite enough I guess).

How did I get to this point where something as precious as life became a burden instead of a blessing? How could I sit and see something so beautiful and be glad that I'll never see it again? What could have happened to me that I thought so little of living, when in reality I had so much to live for? When did I spend more time thinking how to end my life instead of living it?

Have you ever said "I wish I was never born"? It's amazing how we can feel so bad at one particular moment that we are able to disregard an entire lifetime of blessings.

At age nineteen I was diagnosed as having a seizure disorder, and through the years that followed, the diagnoses included, bi-polar disorder, chemical imbalance and manic depressive. I was treated with just about every known anti-depressant imaginable, and hospitalized several times for depression, attempted suicide five different times, and as a last resort given electro shock therapy.

So why was I so depressed? The doctors had all kinds of reasons from emotional to physical, but I believe it was my focus. Life is like a camera, whatever you focus on is what develops. My focus was on myself. I was constantly looking at things with me as the central focus, no matter what it was. If my family wanted to do something, it depended on how I

felt. If there was something I wanted, I bought it. No matter what was going on, I looked at how it affected me. I was always searching for peace and happiness, and believe me, I went to every store imaginable and didn't find it. During the course of my life I have had thirty-eight jobs, lived in twenty-nine places and couldn't even count the number of cars and toys I bought, looking for peace of mind. I would have done just about anything to change the state of mind I was in.

So why am I still here? I asked that question more times than I can remember. I discovered if you're still here, God's not done with you.

Chapter 2

What Can Cause Depression?

Can a faithful and growing believer get depressed?

According to a recent poll, one out of every five people suffer from depression, I'm not talking about the times when someone might feel a little down, but severe depression, to the point where people need to seek the guidance of counselors and medication. That does not mean the other four were Christians.

The definition found in the dictionary for depression: A state of general emotional dejection, despair, sadness, hopelessness and sometimes suicidal tendencies.

*PS 25:17 The troubles of my heart have multiplied;
free me from my anguish.*

Satan has numerous weapons he uses: lies, deceit, greed, desperation, feelings of self doubt, hopelessness, and rejection. I think he uses these fiery darts to aim at a target, and the bull's eye is depression. If Satan hits that bull's eye, it can lead to separation from God, hopelessness, the desire for death and in extreme cases, suicide. So, do Christians suffer from depression? The Bible gives us some examples of people who had reached a point in their lives where they would have preferred being dead or wished they had never been born. When we look at the life of some of these righteous men, we can identify several factors that lead to depression. We also discover several ways how God calls us to respond to it.

One of the great men of faith was Elijah. His cause of depression was *fear* of what might happen to him. Shortly after Elijah had challenged the prophets of Baal to have their god bring fire down to burn their sacrifices. All day the prophets of Baal called on their god with no avail. Elijah at

that time was full of confidence and not worried, knowing in his heart everything was going the way it should.

1KI 18:27 At noon Elijah began to taunt them. "Shout louder!" he said. "Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened." [28] So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. [29] Midday passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention.

Now things are going his way. The priests have failed and now it was Elijah's turn, he poured water all over his sacrifice and called on the One and only True and living God.

1KI 18:36 At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: "O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. [37] Answer me, O LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again."

The Lord brought fire down to burn the sacrifices. Elijah put to death 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah. How does a person go from seeing one of God's great miracles, and then falls into a deep depression, so deep that he no longer wants to live?

1KI 19:1 Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. [2] So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them."

1KI 19:3 Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, [4] while he himself went a day's journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." [5] Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep.

Fear is a powerful force in our lives and we rather do anything than to face it, even wish we were dead. There is an acronym for fear False Evidence Appearing Real. Nothing happened to Elijah, it was only a threat from someone he must have felt was more powerful than God. Elijah must not have thought it out. God just used him in an unbelievably powerful way, defeating eight hundred men and now he is afraid of a threat from one woman. Think about the things God has delivered you from.

*ISA 41:13 For I am the LORD, your God,
who takes hold of your right hand
and says to you, Do not fear;
I will help you.*

Have you ever felt like you have had enough, and you don't think you can take anymore? You become afraid, you are full of hopelessness, and you don't want to see another day, you just don't know how you can possibly make it through? Place this verse in your heart.

Another major cause for depression is *loss*. Loss of a loved one, health, finances and anything else we hold dear to us. Job was a God loving man that lived a righteous life, and in just one day, he lost everything he had. He was sitting at the table, and messengers kept coming in telling he lost his donkeys and oxen, then he lost his sheep and servants, next his camels, and finally his sons and daughters. He still held strong in his faith and trusted in the Lord, then his body became inflicted with terrible sores and he lost his health.

JOB 2:7 So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. [8] Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes.

Then we get to the point of self pity and much too often we point the finger of blame at others or God as Job did while talking to God he says:

*JOB 10:18 "Why then did you bring me out of the womb?
I wish I had died before any eye saw me.*

*JOB 10:19 If only I had never come into being,
or had been carried straight from the womb to the grave!*

*JOB 10:20 Are not my few days almost over?
Turn away from me so I can have a moment's joy*

*JOB 10:21 before I go to the place of no return,
to the land of gloom and deep shadow,*

*JOB 10:22 to the land of deepest night,
of deep shadow and disorder,
where even the light is like darkness."*

So instead of trusting God we blame Him. Have you ever said "I wish I was never born"? Life is just so terrible that you wished you never existed. It's amazing how we can feel so bad at one particular moment that we are able to disregard an entire lifetime of blessings.

John 16:33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Sometimes we get depressed simply because things aren't going the way we want them to. Have you ever gotten so mad and depressed because things *don't go your way*? You feel as if God doesn't care so why should you or maybe someone you hate is doing good and it drives you crazy. I know in my life some of my best moments were times that someone else was doing worst than me and in turn some of my worse when that someone was doing better. A friend of mine recently got a divorce and when I saw him he was down and I asked him what was troubling him. He explained how well his wife and children seemed to be doing without him and that drove him into depression. Look at Jonah's words .

Jonah 4:[2] He prayed to the LORD, "O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. [3] Now, O LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."

Jonah just was saved from certain death being swallowed by a large fish, but instead of being thankful for his good fortune he was depressed because the people he hated were doing well. He didn't get his way.

*ISA 55:9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts."*

How about Moses, a friend of God. Wow what a title. Here is a man who actually talked to God saw all the miracles God worked through him and yet his faith and strength is no greater than ours at times. We all come to a point where we are *overwhelmed*, because we are so focused on what we can only do instead of what God can do through us.

Numbers 11:[11] He asked the LORD, "Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me? [12] Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their forefathers? [13] Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me, 'Give us meat to eat!' [14] I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. [15] If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now--if I have found favor in your eyes--and do not let me face my own ruin."

It seemed as if I was always overwhelmed. I felt I was carrying the weight of the world on my shoulders and I could never catch a break. There was never enough time in the day and if I didn't do it, it wasn't going to get done. Does any of this sound familiar to you? Do you live your day knowing you can't possibly get through it? You are so overwhelmed with the thoughts in your head you can't seem to get anything done? Believe me you are not alone.

1 Peter 5: [7] Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

These were not mere men, but the saints of the Bible. Men who spoke directly to God and yet they were not free from feeling the full force of depression, the desire not to live.

Chapter 3

Back to the Rock

Well we're back to La Jolla as I was sitting on my rock looking over the beautiful ocean. I didn't feel nervous, and in a way was glad that I would never have to worry about anything again. As I sat there, I listened to the sounds the waves made crashing over the rocks. I took my candy box out of my pocket and opened it. I looked over the ocean, and for the first time in my life I decided to talk to God. I said, "God I understand that I don't deserve to be in heaven for what I'm about to do, but I don't believe I belong in hell either. I've been a good person, there isn't anyone that could say I did anything terrible to them. I never was unfaithful to my wife and I treated my parents with respect. I loved my children and have tried to take care of their needs and raise them right. I know I haven't gone to church much and I understand that I don't deserve to go to heaven. I could also understand why you wouldn't want me there. How about we just end it here? Let me just go to sleep and never wake up and it will be as if I was never here. It would have been better if I wasn't here anyway. What do you say? Is it a deal?" I waited a moment almost expecting a response. Do you believe that the first time I decided to talk to God I told him He messed up? In reality I was saying, you made a mistake, you made me. You did okay with the earth, ocean, mountains and the universe in general, but when you made me you messed up."

When it was obvious God wasn't going to answer me I took the pills then sat there and asked God for another favor, "Please God, I don't mind dying please just don't let it hurt." I had ignored God all my life, now I started asking for favors. I sat there wondering what was going to happen, wondering if the medication was ever going to take effect, then all of a sudden things started to spin. I felt a wrenching in my stomach and it took everything for me not to throw-up. I

started to feel this horrible pain in my head. I yelled, “I asked for no pain,” as if I had really made a deal. I started to shake uncontrollably and it felt as if my heart was going to explode. My heart was beating so heavy I could feel the beat in my hands and feet. The pressure in my head was so severe I thought my eyes were going to pop out of their sockets. I pleaded to God, “Please don’t let it hurt anymore make it stop.” By now everything on the beach appeared to be moving and then it became dark and it appeared my prayer was answered.

I took enough medication to kill at least three people. I took the pills around nine thirty that morning and went into a coma. I sat on that rock looking up into the sky until six o’clock that evening. Someone walking on the beach saw me fall off the rock into the sand. My face was burnt and peeling from the sun. My arms with my palms pointing up were laying on my legs as if I was presenting a gift to someone. You could see the outline of my arms on my sunburned legs and how my arms were burned. All day long I must have followed the sun because as burned as my face was the top of my head was barely red at all. The person who found me called the police.

I was taken to the hospital where my family was called in and told they were not sure if I was going to make it. If I did survive I might have severe liver problems and they were not sure how much brain damage was caused. I was in a coma for several days and awoke with no side effects. Though no one is really sure how much brain damage I have, doctors wondered about that before the overdose.

When I woke up my mind wasn’t clear and I was confused on what had happened. Then it came to me and I couldn’t believe I was still alive. Why would God do this to me? There are people all over the earth dying that would give anything to stay alive and all I wanted was to die. I looked at my family and saw my daughter whose eyes were swollen

from crying so much. Everything in my life has been about me. I made as if I thought about my family when I decided to commit suicide, but in reality it was the easy way out for me. I thought for sure I wasn't going to be here. I wasn't prepared and wasn't sure what I was feeling. I hurt all the people I loved and I didn't know what to say to make the hurt go away. I couldn't even say I would never do that again, even to comfort them in that moment.

God sometimes waits until we have messed up our lives so bad, and we are in the absolute worst situation we have ever been in, to come and pull us out. You see for some of us, that's the only time we are willing to let God work in our lives, when we finally have messed things up so bad we give up. That's what was happening to me.

Chapter 4

Opening My Eyes to Others

The room I was in was for people who had to be watched around the clock that suffered from severe neurological ailments. In that room was a young Marine that had been in there for two and a half months. One day he was driving a truck on maneuvers, the steering failed and the truck went up a hill and rolled over. As the truck rolled, he got thrown out of the cab, the truck landed on his leg, arm and head. He had been in that bed all that time without any emotional response with the exception of severe pain. He was being fed through a tube and could only have water by sucking on a sponge.

While the doctors were attending to me, my sister, who is actually a professional comedian, took the opportunity to perform for my new roommate. My sister did what she always did, treat everyone the same no matter what. She went over and asked what the heck he was doing just lying around. His mother who was sitting next to him was unsure what to do and didn't say anything. She went around his bed and found things to poke fun of. She did a command performance to an audience of one and it was one of her toughest. Kathy picked up the sponge that he used to moisten his mouth with and asked if it was a giant Q-tip. She showed it to his mother and asked what the heck it was for and his mother while laughing now explained that was how he drank. She said no wonder you're not getting better, you're dehydrated and proceeded to fire each nurse in the room along with the doctor that was caring for me. The young man lying in bed started to smile. His mother looked over and cried out, "He's smiling." Kathy said of course this is funny stuff and he tried to laugh. His eyes were focused on Kathy, something he wasn't able to do and the nurse rushed to his side. As the nurse was checking him, Kathy went to the opposite side of the bed and held his hand. His mother, in between her crying said, "That's the first sign of

any kind he's shown. Thank you so much for making him laugh." Kathy smiled and said, "Up until now there was nothing to laugh about," then kissed him on the forehead.

The young man's name was Tim and he was one day older than my son who was now in the Army. Gail, Tim's mother, told Kathy about that day the Marines called her in Connecticut, to tell her about her son's accident. When Gail and her husband arrived, the doctor who was treating Tim told them they were keeping Tim alive with life support and he wasn't going to make it. The chaplain of the Marines had conveyed the same message to them, but they refused to have him disconnected. A few days later a miracle happened and he started breathing on his own. Then the doctors told them his leg was shattered and he would never be able to walk on it and his throat was damaged and he probably would never be able to speak. They were also told if he did survive, he may only have the mental capacity of a first or second grader. Tim had been lying in that bed for two and a half months with his mother by his side, and the only thing she heard from him was the cry of pain, until that night.

Kathy made her way back to me as the doctor was finishing up his examination. The doctor told my family that I was very lucky and that he wanted to do other tests to see if any of my organs may have been damaged by the overdose. I laid there as the three of them gave me a lecture and took turns calling me stupid, selfish, insensitive and other descriptive words. I was still groggy and my head was spinning as they each took their well-deserved shot. When they were finished they each told me how much they loved me and the nurse told them it was time to leave. Before Kathy left she said, "Oh by the way, Tim, this is my big stupid brother Mark, big stupid brother Mark, Tim." I looked over and said, "Hi Tim," but he never looked in my direction.

The next morning about five o'clock, I woke up and standing over me was an orderly. He was a big man and introduced

himself as John. He told me I stunk and needed a shower before I smelled up the whole floor. I thanked him for his discretion and agreed it would be a good idea. I tried to sit up but my back was so stiff I could barely get up. After all, I was sitting on a hard rock for approximately eight hours. John helped me get to the shower, but I was still dizzy and not standing too well. He helped me get undressed and handed me soap and a wash cloth. The water felt good and my mind was beginning to clear up a little, which wasn't necessarily a good thing. I looked down towards my feet and noticed all the sand that was washing off my body. It was forming a mud puddle in the bottom of the shower. It took most of my concentration just to wash myself. When I was finished I began to dry myself, when I heard John ask if I was okay. I told him I think I'll live. When I passed Tim's bed I looked down at him and held his hand. I told him he was going to be all right. I don't know why I said it, it just came out suddenly, but I knew it was true. I looked at him and smiled. Tim didn't look up at me or make any indication that he heard me, but I knew he did.

When I returned to my bed, there was breakfast and I uncovered it and told Tim his breakfast looked better than mine. Tim just lay there staring into space with a tube inserted in his stomach. For some reason I kept talking to Tim, as if he understood what I was saying. I told him about my son who was now in the Army in Georgia, about my daughter and how she just recently came out to California from Ohio. Periodically the nurse in charge of our room would look up, hoping Tim would give some response. At one point I said, "Well enough about me, tell me a little about you." There was a moment of silence and I said, "I see you're not much of a conversationalist," then kept on talking. It was strange, while I was talking to Tim I told him all about the good things in my life. I told him about my family, friends and good things that had happened to me, things I should be thankful for. I normally didn't think of these things, but it felt natural to talk about them to him. The more

I told Tim the better I felt. When I was finished talking, I looked at Tim. There in the bed next to me was a young man fighting for his life and here I was trying to end mine. As I looked into his face he turned his head and looked into my eyes. I looked back and smiled and again told him, you're going to be all right Tim, hang in there.

Just then Tim cried out in pain and tried to grab his stomach, but his hands were tied down. He then started going into convulsions. The nurse ran over to calm him down and pushed the button for more help. His mother held his hand and told him that she was there. I looked at his face distorted from the pain. I hurt just looking at him, feeling useless, but his mom continued to hold his hand, telling him he was going to be all right. She'd been going through this for two and a half months, but still insisted he was going to be okay. I watched as they attempted to medicate him, to subdue the pain. I looked into his mother's face to see the love she had for her son. I asked God to help him and ease his pain then asked what I could do to help. The pain started to subside as his body relaxed and he laid his head back on the pillow. I looked over at his mother as she put her head down and sighed, "Thank you God."

I lay there that evening looking at Tim, trying to imagine what he must be going through. Then I thought about my son in the Army, how this could have been him. How would I handle this situation if it were my son? Could I give myself totally to my son and be there each day? I watched Tim as he would close his eyes and open them quickly because of the pain. I saw a young man fighting for his life and I felt the feeling inside of me wanting to help. I got out of my bed and went to his side and knelt down next to him. I whispered, "You can depend on me." I held his hand and he turned his head and looked me in the eyes. His face, which was tense with pain, relaxed and a calming look came over his face. I kissed him on the forehead and said good night, then went back to my bed.

The next day the doctor came in and said I would be released the next day and made an appointment with the doctor they wanted me to see. I said, "Great, I'm ready to get out of this place." As I said that I happened to look over at Tim's mom and saw her put her head down and then looked over and said, "I'm really going to miss you." I told her she wasn't going to get rid of me that easy. "I plan on checking up on Tim a couple times a week," I said. She said, "God must have sent you here for me." I couldn't imagine God being able to use me for anything, I've always felt useless.

The next morning I gave Tim a cheerful, "good morning" and told him he looked lovely. I sat down, held his hand and explained to him that I was leaving, but I was going to visit. I told him he was important in my life, and that I loved him and there wasn't anything I wouldn't do for him. These just weren't words, but true feelings I felt in my heart. I looked him in the eyes and he turned and looked into mine and he squeezed my hand. I told him he had quite a grip and the nurse, stationed in the room, asked if he squeezed my hand. I said squeezed, he almost broke it, as I smiled. She came over to the bed and Tim was still holding onto my hand. She told me that was the first time he squeezed anyone's hand that wasn't related to pain. I looked at him and said I told you, you were going to be all right.

It was time to leave and I had no idea what to do next. I knew we were behind in our bills and couldn't afford to live in my dream house anymore. As I was about to feel sorry for myself, I began to think of Tim. I wondered if he was really going to be all right. I looked down to the hand Tim squeezed and smiled.

A few days later I went back to the hospital to see Tim. It seemed strange walking into the hospital, where I was wheeled out of a few days prior. I went up to Tim's room, and there was Tim's Mom in her regular seat sitting next to

him. With a smile on my face I asked how my ex-roommate was. I went over, gave her a hug and kiss on the cheek, then asked how she was doing. She looked so tired and said she was doing the best that she could, and asked how I was doing. I told her I was doing very well, which I was, for some reason. I sat next to Tim, held his hand and asked him how things were going. He squeezed my hand again and then looked over at me. His mom said, "That is so strange, you're the only person that he responds to. He seems to be more alert and responsive when people talk to him." I said, "great" and turned to Tim and said, "Way to go," and put my hand out to shake his. Tim lifted his hand, put it in mine and squeezed. I looked in his eyes while he looked back in mine, then he smiled. I asked him when he learned his new trick, shaking hands. He left go of my hand and started falling asleep, because of the pain medication. I sat there and talked as if he was awake. I told him I would always be there for him, and if he needed anything that he could depend on me. Every time I would visit Tim I had a strange mixture of feelings ranging from sad to excited. I was experiencing the emotions of caring for someone above myself.

I would visit Tim three and four times a week and on one of those visits his mom was sitting at her regular spot. I smiled and cheerfully asked her how she was doing. She said fine, but the expression on her face told me she wasn't. Then I turned to Tim and said, "Hi Tim. How's it going?" He looked at me and instead of putting his hand out today he said, "Hi Mark." I almost fell on the floor and if his mom wasn't sitting down I'm sure she would have. The nurse stood up at her desk and asked if he talked. "Yes," I said like a proud father whose baby just said daddy, "He said hi Mark." Tim looked at me and smiled, I got on my knees next to him. I knelt there saying, "thank you, thank you dear God." As I prayed Tim reached over with his hand and held mine. I held his with both my hands and told him I loved him and that he was going to be all right. A gurney rolled into the room just then to take Tim down for more tests and

therapy. The nurse told the orderly that Tim had talked. The orderly, surprised and excited said, “all right Tim,” but Tim just lied there as he’d been doing. “I guess you’re all talked out for now,” he said. They lifted him up on the gurney as Tim cried out in pain. I went over to him and said, “Everything is going to be okay, just as I told you the first time I met you.” I can still hear Tim’s voice in my ear, Hi Mark. I never realized how wonderful my name sounded.

Chapter 5

Never Know Who God Will Use

When they called my daughter and told her that I was in the hospital she was with a fellow she was only dating for a couple of weeks, Justin. Justin volunteered to take her to the hospital and sat outside the room while Danielle was there with me. I'm not sure how long he waited for her, but now knowing this young man as my son-in-law he would have been there as long as it took.

When I finally got home from the hospital, totally lost in what I was going to do, Justin came up to me and handed me a book entitled Prison to Praise. This was actually one of the first times I met him and yet he had the courage to approach this obvious troubled man and offer help. He told me that maybe this book would be able to help me sort things out. I thanked him for the book and placed the book on the end table

The next morning I sat down on the couch and looked over to see the book on the end table. I was never a good reader and rarely attempted to read a book. I always had trouble focusing my thoughts. When I did try to read, my mind would wander and I wouldn't remember what I read. However, I still picked up the book and began to read. The book opened with the author, Merlin Carothers, talking about his time in the army. Since my son was in the army that drew my attention. After a couple of pages he talked about being stationed in Fort Benning, Georgia, the same place where my son was stationed. Now it really got my attention. I sat down that day and read the entire book. The book described how thanking God changed his life. The book talked about Christianity, something I knew nothing about and how he became a chaplain in the army helping people. The main principle I received from the book was to thank God each day for everything you have in your life. The book described that

we have so much to be thankful for. The fact we are breathing and had the opportunity to improve our life each day was a miracle. It spoke of putting the focus on God, not yourself and to trust in God. All these ideas were new to me. After I was finished reading I knelt down in front of the couch, put my hands together and started thinking of things to thank God for. I started by thanking Him for my wife, my daughter, my son and sister. I then went on to thank God for my mother, father, brother and friends. The more I thanked God, the more there was to be thankful for. Finally after several minutes of thanking God, I got up and sat on the couch. I felt different, in fact I felt pretty good. I went and put my shoes on and went for a walk with my dog. It was a beautiful day so I thanked God for that, I looked down at my dog as she sniffed everything in sight and I thanked God for her. I noticed things I never noticed before such as plants, small animals and my neighbors working in a yard. Even the air smelled different, but everything I noticed I thanked God for. Even with all the problems I had, at that moment I felt better than I remember feeling in a long time.

That Sunday Justin invited us to his church. I figured since I've been talking to God each day it was time to visit Him at home. The only church I had ever attended before was Catholic Church when I was young. Today however, I was about to attend a Christian church. I had no idea what to expect, but I knew I was searching for something that was missing in my life and this seemed as good a place as any to find it. As we pulled up to the church there were several people waving as we came in so I waved back. We pulled into the parking lot, again there were people directing us where to park and smiling and waving at us. The church was a large building with a row of palm trees lining the walkway. It didn't look like a church, there was no steeple or church bells. We got out of the car and walked to the entrance of the church. There were people smiling and shaking my hand to welcome me. We walked through the untraditional glass doors. The inside foyer looked just like any building with no

crucifixes or stations of the cross, nothing indicating that it was a church. We walked into the sanctuary and again someone shaking my hand and giving me a program. Walking inside it looked more like an auditorium with white patio chairs instead of pews and with the exception of a large sign over the stage reading Jesus, I thought I was in a theatre. Off to one side of the stage were musical instruments, on the other were microphones and music stands. We all sat down while I tried to get comfortable in my plastic chair. I sat there confused about my surroundings and lack of religious artifacts. I watched as several musicians with saxophones, trumpets, clarinets, and guitars filled the area next to the stage along with a drummer. Then the choir marched on stage along with the conductor of the group. I wasn't sure if I was in church or at a concert. I was ready to hear a slow gospel song with a solo done by a woman who could reach a note only my dog could hear. Then the music started. It had an upbeat tempo, instantly everyone stood and started to clap their hands. I began clapping, and the choir started to sing. There were two large television monitors on either side of the stage with the words of the song. There were plenty of people singing and I was sure they would be able to drown out my terrible voice, so I began to sing. The song was about Jesus, how He is with us, how He is our brother and cares for us. The song went on to tell how He gave his life so our lives would be saved. They played a couple more songs and ended with a song called "Shout to the Lord." The woman who sang it sang with such conviction, I was moved. The song was over and the pastor came out yelling, "Let's hear it for the Lord," and started applauding while everyone was standing and clapping with him. My first thoughts were about those television evangelists with the rhinestone jackets, asking for money and healing people on stage. He finally had everyone sit down and asked, "Isn't the Lord good?" People all over the sanctuary were either yelling yes or amen. This was definitely different from the church I was used to. He told everyone to get out his or her Bible. I had never owned a Bible and had only seen one in a motel room. I

looked around and it seemed as though everyone else had one. I felt as though I were back in school and had forgotten my books at home, ready for the teacher to notice I had forgotten.

The message that day was about how the devil can influence our thinking. He asked if we ever tell ourselves that we're no good or incapable of doing things right. He went on to say that the devil was the father of lies and if we let him, he can lead us astray. The things he was saying and the way he was saying them made me feel as though he was talking to me. I had to look around to see if there was anyone else there. The pastor didn't give the message with fire and brimstone or shout, "repent." He simply told of everyday occurrences that may happen to anyone. He told humorous stories that related to his message. As he spoke I thought about the way I looked at life and how I always put myself down and looked at the worst side of a situation. The idea of Satan causing some of the way I thought seemed far-fetched. As I thought about it, a feeling of hope came over me. The situations he talked about were situations that had happened to me, but I always thought they only happened to me. It was comforting to find out that I wasn't the only one. The pastor said, "All the answers are written right here in the word," as he held up the Bible. He said, "Jesus had already won the fight against Satan and if you let Him, He will fight for each one of you." I wanted to believe, but it still seemed strange for me. At the end of his message he asked us to bow our head in prayer. He gave a beautiful prayer, at the end of which he asked if anyone wanted to accept Jesus as his or her personal savior. I didn't know exactly what that meant, and I didn't feel as if I should raise my hand, so I sat there. After that they took up the collection and sang one more song. Normally when I would leave church everyone would be quiet and rush to get to their cars to go get breakfast or go home. Not at this church. People stood outside and talked to each other. A couple came up to us and introduced themselves. Justin saw

a few of his friends and they came over and also introduced themselves.

I left that day curious about what was said. I made plans to go back the following Sunday, but I wanted to stop and buy a Bible. I wanted to be ready in case there was a test the following Sunday.

I sat at my desk and there lying on it was my new Bible. I took my Bible, went out on the patio, sat down and began to read. I started at the beginning, but I didn't understand what was happening. I remembered that the pastor gave us notes, with Bible verses to look up. I found my notes and started to look up different scriptures. I realized the version I had, had notes on the bottom explaining certain passages. I was like a kid who finally figured out how to build that model I had in my room for months. I spent most of that day reading different parts of the Bible, finding stories I had seen on movies like, Moses, Samson and Delilah, David and Goliath and realized Ben Hur wasn't actually a Bible story. When I went to bed that night I prayed, thanking God for that day. I was turning into a praying machine, two times in one day. Along with thanking Him, I asked him to show me what it is I was supposed to do. Something was happening to me, but I didn't know what it was, or what I was supposed to do about it.

The rest of the week I made phone calls to find a permanent job, worked around the house and read. It was time I had never had before. Kathy called the next day to check up on me, as she had been doing. I told her I had a strange question for her and she replied, "So what's new?" I told her about my experiences in regards to the church, thanking God each day and praying at night. "It's about time," Kathy said. She asked me, "How do you think I'm able to speak in front of so many people? How do you think I survived everything I survived, and how do you think I'm able to help people. God has directed my life and has taken care of me all these years."

She then told me about the day that she found out I took the overdose. She said, “I was so mad at God for letting this happen that I yelled, how could you let this happen to my brother. As I was lying there crying I heard a voice say, why are you crying, he’s still alive isn’t he? God isn’t finished with you yet.” Kathy told me about situations that she had been in that only God could have gotten her out of and about all the gifts He had given her. Before she hung up she said, “Be patient and watch God work in your life.” It was as if everyone else knew about God, but me.

Then came Sunday and time to go to church. This time I waved back to the people standing on the corner and in the parking lot. I even felt comfortable shaking the occasional hand that was extended as we went through to the sanctuary. We took our seats right before the music began. After a couple of songs they announced, “turn to five people around you and welcome them to the church.” I always hated shaking hands with strangers. I turned around pretending I was shaking hands, but in this church people were determined to shake your hand and they didn’t look down when they approached you. One woman even came up and gave me a hug. I looked around to see if my wife saw it and if she was going to deck the lady right there on the spot.

The pastor came out, as he did before, yelling and clapping for Jesus. The man was so full of energy, some of it spills over onto you as you watch him. This week’s message was about the burdens we all carry around with us. He talked about the burdens of guilt, pride, jealousy, past experiences, desire to impress others and the list went on. He talked about the burden of the past and how no matter what we do we take that burden with us wherever we go. He talked about how that burden continually grows, since we never throw any of it away and we keep adding to it. Then he really hit home when he said, “The burden can grow into depression and some of us may get to a place where we feel ending our life is the only way out.” The pastor went on to say that some of

us can't enjoy our lives because we feel there is no present, only the bad memories of the past and the worries of tomorrow. As he was speaking I wanted to cry out loud. My body was shaking and it took everything to hold back the tears. I couldn't even look up at him as he spoke I sat there with my head down looking at the back of the chair in front of me. He went on to say, "Life is right now, this moment and as soon as I speak it's already in the past and nothing I can do will change that. The past is history, tomorrow a mystery and right now is a gift. That's why it's called the present." Then he asked, "Do you want to know how to get rid of your burdens?" I almost stood up right there and yelled, yes. He said, "Give them to God, He wants them. He loves us so much that he was ridiculed, beaten, tortured and died for our sins so that we may have peace. Take your burdens and lay them at the foot of the cross. He doesn't just want you to give your burdens to Him He commands it." Then the Pastor read John 16:33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." He then said, "Thank God for all your blessings and ask Him to take your burdens and turn them into blessings." I thought to myself, "I've been thanking God for what He has given me and that has already helped me. I don't know how He could take the past bitter memories and make them a blessing, but I was willing to ask Him." That day after the message he asked again for us to bow our heads as he prayed. When he came to the part and asked, "Who wants to have a personal relationship with Jesus? Who believes that Jesus rose from the dead so that we may have life everlasting? Raise your hand so we may pray for you." I raised my hand right away so hard I thought my arm was going to come out of the socket. With my hand up and head down I felt a chill come over my body and I began to cry. Not tears of sadness, but tears of joy and I didn't care who saw me.

When service was just about over the pastor said, "Anyone who made a decision for Christ, there will be prayer partners

to pray with you.” I went up after service, my eyes still red from crying and my body shaking. We met with one of the pastors there in front of the stage and I told him I wanted to do what was right. He smiled at me and gave me a hug. I couldn’t believe I was doing this, something I would have thought was strange, bizarre and would have probably made fun of. We prayed together and at the end of the prayer he told us we were now born again. What a terrific thought, to be born again. A chance to do it all over, but this time to do it right.

I left the church that day feeling different, with hope and joy. I couldn’t explain it, and didn’t care to, I just wanted to enjoy it. The rest of that day was spent walking around the neighborhood, over to a nearby park and watching the children play. I took time to read the Bible, visited with God, relaxed and celebrated my new birthday.

Chapter 6

God Guides the Saints

I think that's what happened to Elijah, Moses, Jonah and Job. Their lives were great when their focus was kept on the Lord and all the wonderful things He can do. When they put their focus on themselves without considering God's plan, feelings of hopelessness and depression came over them. They forgot about what God can do and focused on their own limited abilities, and they knew their abilities couldn't get them out of their mess.

God answers us all differently when we call on Him. When He finally answered Job, He was stern to say the least, and let Job have it. He told Job, how dare you question God's motives and plans for your life.

JOB 40:2 "Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him?"

Let him who accuses God answer him!"

Even though God was stern with Job, He gave him a chance to repent, He restored Job's life and made him prosperous. God gave him twice as much as he had before and even blessed him with seven sons and three daughters.

For Elijah God sent an angel to restore and comfort him.

1 Kings 19:[5] Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." [6] He looked around, and there by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.

The angel fed him and gave him rest so God could help him get his mind back on the right track. I believe during that time, Elijah remembered all of the great things the Lord had

done, and realized that there is nothing He can't do. Elijah had been able to restore his body and his mind and rebuild his faith so he was better equipped to move on.

What about Jonah? I think God should have laid him out for his disobedience. Even when he finally did what God called him to do, he did it in a half hearted way. Yet God knows what each one of us needs and He took the time to show Jonah why He did what he did for Nineveh, even though he is God and doesn't owe us any explanation.

Jonah 4:5 Jonah went out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. [6] Then the LORD God provided a vine and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the vine. [7] But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the vine so that it withered. [8] When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live."

Jonah 4:9 But God said to Jonah, "Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?" "I do," he said. "I am angry enough to die."

Jonah 4:10 But the LORD said, "You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. [11] But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?"

Then there was Moses. God proved over and over again that there was nothing He couldn't do, but God's love for us his never ending.

Numbers 11:16 The LORD said to Moses: "Bring me seventy of Israel's elders who are known to you as leaders and officials among the people. Have them come to the Tent of Meeting, that they may stand there with you. [17] I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take of the Spirit that is on you and put the Spirit on them. They will help you carry the burden of the people so that you will not have to carry it alone.

Numbers 11:18 "Tell the people: `Consecrate yourselves in preparation for tomorrow, when you will eat meat. The LORD heard you when you wailed, "If only we had meat to eat! We were better off in Egypt!" Now the LORD will give you meat, and you will eat it. [19] You will not eat it for just one day, or two days, or five, ten or twenty days, [20] but for a whole month--until it comes out of your nostrils and you loathe it--because you have rejected the LORD, who is among you, and have wailed before him, saying, "Why did we ever leave Egypt?" ' "

Numbers 11:21 But Moses said, "Here I am among six hundred thousand men on foot, and you say, `I will give them meat to eat for a whole month!' [22] Would they have enough if flocks and herds were slaughtered for them? Would they have enough if all the fish in the sea were caught for them?"

Numbers 11:23 The LORD answered Moses, "Is the LORD's arm too short? You will now see whether or not what I say will come true for you."

He explained to Moses what to do and then God gave them their request for meat. Why would God care so much for people that seem unappreciative, self-centered and worthless at times, because He loves us. We'll probably never understand why, but He does.

Chapter 7

Time To Start Over

What my God did for me was a series of miracles one right after another. I compare God's love to professional wrestling. Wait, give me a moment to explain. Have you ever seen tag team wrestling? It's when there are two people on a team, one is in the ring fighting, and when he gets in trouble, he reaches out to touch the other one so he can come in and take over and save him. All they have to do is reach out, then touch and their partner jumps right in. Somehow, that selfish prayer of mine that day at the beach was close enough to make contact that my savior jumped in to save me. God was going to show me that He doesn't make mistakes. Everything He creates is for a purpose. He used several people to get the message to me. He took the focus I had on myself, and aimed it toward others who needed me. He brought other people into my life to guide me. One thing I did when I was so badly depressed was keep everyone out of my life. Have you ever done that? It seems that when you need people the most, you turn your back on them and don't want them around. One of God's greatest gifts is companionship and fellowship with each other. How many times does our Lord reference in His Word about loving each other and helping each other?

John 13:34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. [35] By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Romans 12:9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. [10] Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.

1 Peter 1:22 Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.

1 John 4: [11] Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. [12] No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

He didn't create us to handle this life alone, we can't. We need God to succeed and then He blesses us with people around us.

You may be wondering what ever happened to Tim, my military buddy. When Tim arrived at the hospital a little over five months prior to my last visit they told his mom he was going to die. Many people told Tim that he wasn't going to be able to do things and he proved them wrong. Yet he still wasn't sure what he was going to be able to do. I was there the day they removed his feeding tube and gave him something to eat for the first time. Tim was my hero, the young man God chose to help me, and then God used me to help him.

I went home one night and made a card for Tim. I scanned a picture that was taken of Tim and me. I placed it on the front of the card with the words, "To Tim the great explorer. I will be following your journey as you progress and hope to see you at its conclusion." I wrote the inside of the card so fast I had to wait until I was finished to read it:

Life Is Basic

Remember when you first joined the Marines and they told you how many push-ups you were going to do? You said to yourself, "I can't do that."
But you did.

Then they told you how many miles you were going to run with full field pack.

And you said to yourself, "I can't do that."

But you did.

Then they told you all the things you must accomplish to pass basics.

And you said to yourself, "I can't do that."

But you did.

Then one day you woke up in a hospital unable talk. And the doctors told you you'll never be able to talk.

But you did.

Now you lay here hardly able to move. And think, you'll never be able to walk.

But you will.

You lay here confused and unable to think clearly. And say to yourself I'll never be smart.

But you will.

All great explorers will take the toughest path, the path less traveled. They know by taking that path they will learn and discover things they would never have been able to discover anywhere else. They discover feelings they never knew they had. They will see things in a different way. Even though this journey will take longer than if they had taken the path most traveled, when they return they will tell others about their adventure so others can learn and become stronger in their knowledge.

Tim you are one of these great explorers. By fate you are traveling on a path only a few have taken. A path that is full of pain and confusion. A long journey that can only be completed by will and faith. As you look back on all the things in your life that you felt you could not do, but did, this journey will be just one more accomplishment.

I know you will fulfill your life's journey. For you see, you have a Guide who knows the path you are on. Listen to Him with all your heart. Follow His direction and never give up hope. Draw strength from His love and the love around you. When you finish your journey reach out and tell others so they can become stronger in your knowledge.

Something I was never very good at was writing, but I didn't feel as if I wrote this that night. I sat there and watched someone else do it using my hand. When I stopped and read what was written, I got down on my knees and cried as I felt that special chill come over my body again.

The next day I went to the hospital to give Tim the card. When I arrived Tim had company from some of the Marines he was stationed with. Tim looked uneasy and tried to smile when one of the guys was telling him a joke. I could tell that his friends felt uncomfortable around Tim, seeing him lay there now weighing under a hundred pounds. Tim's mom saw me and came over and gave me a hug. I walked in and said that maybe I should have made a reservation to get in there. Tim's spirits picked up when he saw me and said, "hi Mark." I asked him how it was going and he told me pretty good. I told Tim I would come back later so he could visit with his friends. One of his friends spoke up right away and said, "We have to be going now." I said to Gail, "If you would like to go out for some lunch, I'll stay here and aggravate Tim." Tim spoke up in his raspy voice and said that sounded good to him. His buddies then all shook his hands and left with Gail right behind them. I sat down and said to Tim, "It must have been nice to see all your friends." He looked down and said, "I don't remember any of them, they don't even look familiar." I held his hand and told him, "Maybe that's a part of your life you're not supposed to remember, because of the pain attached to it. You've been through a lot and you're very fortunate to be in as good shape as you are. God must really love you to take such good care

of you.” Tim looked at me and said, “If God loves me why did he let this happen to me at all.” I told him, “I don’t know why God does the things He does, and we don’t need to know. I know now that everything happens for a reason and if we focus on the good that can come out of it we’ll be focusing on God.” I sat there not believing what I was saying. Me, Mr. Depression, giving advice on focusing on the good. Will the miracles ever cease? Tim said, “What good could possibly come out of this?” “You’ll be going home soon to see your family, financially you should be taken care of, giving you time to do things that you would want to do, and have time to go to college.” I said, “We were able to meet and become friends.” I told Tim how much he meant to me, being in my life and how he has helped me. I told him, “I have never thought about someone more than I think about myself, and you have been in my thoughts and prayers continually.” Tim looked up at me and I bent over to give him a hug. I told him I made something for him and gave him the card I made. He opened it and saw the picture on the front, then began to laugh. He read the front of the card, which surprised me because I didn’t realize he was able to read yet. I was so happy he could read I hugged him again, he looked at me and said, “What do you think, I’m some kind of a dummy?” I said, “I’m sorry Einstein, please continue,” and we both laughed. I sat there while he read the card trying to calm the emotion I felt listening to him read the words I wrote. As he continued to read his voice began to break up trying to hold back his tears. When he finally finished we both broke down and began to cry then held each other. As I was hugging Tim I heard someone else crying, I turned to see the nurse who was stationed in the room crying and holding out a box of tissues. At that moment Gail returned from lunch in time to see the three of us together wiping our tears and blowing our noses. “What’s going on,” Gail asked. I told her, “we just saw the hospital bill,” and the three of us started to laugh. Tim held out the card and said to Gail, “See what Mark made me.” After Gail read it we passed the tissues to her.

Gail said, “We will be leaving tomorrow on a military plane that is set up like a hospital. It’s going to take us several days to get back to Connecticut.” I told Tim, “I’m going to be out of town tomorrow. I will always stay in touch and someday we’ll see each other again. When you get sick of the cold and snow, come down and stay with me.” I said goodbye to Gail, as she kept thanking me and telling me how much she would miss me. It hurt to say good-bye, but felt good that he was getting better and going back home. Before I left I looked at him and said, “I told you that you were going to be all right.” He said, “How did you know.” I said, “God told me the first time I saw you.”

Tim continued to get better, the boy who wouldn’t be able to walk limped to a wheelchair, wouldn’t be able to talk said good-bye and wouldn’t have more than a first grade mentality, planned on going back to school. I guess wouldn’t isn’t in God’s vocabulary.

It’s been over ten years since the Lord led me to Him. I’ll never forget the day I sat in that chair and raised my hand to give my life to my savior, Jesus. God used so many people to lead me in the right direction and I have been free from all medication even after I was told I would be under a doctor’s care and on medication for the rest of my life.

So how did He do it? He helped me take the focus off of me. He took the burdens I carried all my life, He lightened my load and gave my life meaning and purpose. He put the Holy Spirit within me and changed me as it says in

2 Corinthians 5:[17] Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

I’ve talked to so many Christians about the change in their lives that happened when they received Jesus as Lord and Savior and each one had something different that changed

within them. I remember one of the first things that happened was I couldn't swear anymore and when I heard the God's name used in vain I would get a sharp pain in my heart. But the one thing that really changed was the way I looked at people. I rarely even noticed or cared about them at all. I was so wrapped up in my own life, but now things were different. The homeless were no longer disgusting to me but unfortunate, the elderly no longer were just someone I needed to pass on the road and children were not a bother, but a blessing.

I lived by the beach in a small apartment and I started work early so I would get up at 2:00 a.m. and walk along the beach and pray. I noticed so many homeless people sleeping on the park benches and my heart went out to them. So each week I would purchase several gift cards to the nearby Dairy Queen and place them in a card I made that had

*Proverbs 3:5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;*

*6 in all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make your paths straight.*

on the front and

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

inside and the words "May God continue to bless you and keep you safe, for He cares and loves you." While the people were sleeping I placed the card next to them and quietly left. I would volunteer to help any ministry feed the poor and homeless and led the Thanksgiving Dinner at the church I was at. One day I was going through a very tough time in my life and had no direction on what God wanted me to do. I was heading for work when I saw this one homeless man that stood at the corner each day walking towards the tracks

where he slept. It was Sunday and early so there was no traffic on the road and God put on my heart to stop and give him some money. Like Jonah I didn't want to stop and I made excuses like; I was going the opposite way and there was no way to turn around, I have my own problems and I was running late. One thing I learned God doesn't see our problems the same way we do and had me turn around. I stopped and looked in my wallet and I had a twenty and a one dollar bill in my pocket and looked up to see which one He wanted me to give, as if I didn't know. So I ran over to the man and got his attention. I said I feel I'm supposed to give this to you. Pretty heart felt don't you think? As I handed the money to him I began to walk away and he stopped me and said, "What's your name?" Startled I turned around and said "I'm sorry my name is Mark." The man looked at me and said, "Wow that's my name too." As I looked into his face for the first time I noticed his eyes were this bright blue and his toothless smile warming as he said thank you. I did say God Bless as I left and take care. I walked back to my car wondering what just happened, and realized my anxiety was gone and proceeded to go to work. I never saw Mark again, but I'll never forget him.

Hebrews 13: [2] Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.

I was involved in a couple small church groups and one of the men in the group owned a nursing home. We thought it would be great to prepare a dinner and then show a movie one evening. Some of the men brought their children to help serve. We all showed up early and the people were more than anxious to talk with us. I talked to a man who won the PGA Golf Tournament in 1968 and my friend found Freddy who use to box and knew Rocky Graciono. Freddy had a hunchback and my friend was over six foot five, but Freddy stood firm and occasionally gave him a jab to his stomach. I watched as the kids took the orders after everyone was

seated, ordering shrimp and filet mignon when we only had burgers and hot dogs. However, that day was a banquet a banquet of love.

After dinner we set up the movie on a large screen. It was called, "Joshua", a Christian movie about a modern day Jesus. I remember one part of the movie where a lady was addressing something one of the actors said and said, "You can say that again." The gentleman sitting next to her said, "I didn't say anything" and the two went on for a couple of minutes going back and forth about who said what. Yet it didn't disturb any one else. They appeared to be use to it, but it made me laugh so hard it hurt. At the end of the movie, Freddy came up to me with tears in his eyes. I know what it meant and I hugged him with tears in my eyes and an indescribable wonderful feeling in my spirit. As I was getting things together to leave a woman came up to me and said, "I know who sent you." I looked at her and said, "you do, do you." Then she just looked at me. I looked back and said, "I love Him so much." She said, "It shows," and gave me a big hug. I never truly loved anyone or anything my entire life and now I love someone so much it showed. What a change.

A couple of years passed and I felt called to go to Kentucky. I know I was called because I didn't want to go. Our daughter had moved there and we felt God's leading. So after I prayed with everyone I could get my hands on to tell me not to go, it was time to make arrangements. I remember my best friend telling me he didn't think I should be going and I said great let's pray. After prayer he looked at me and said, I'm really going to miss you. Thanks brother.

We sold our house within a week, God moves quickly at times, and moved to Kentucky a few weeks later. I had no job, but made some money on the house so I wasn't in a big hurry. When I first arrived it was on my heart to go to a nursing home. I remembered a statistic that seventy percent

of all people that go into a nursing home never receive a visitor. There was a nursing home only a couple of miles up the road from where I now lived. I went and asked the receptionist if there was anyone that needed someone to talk to. It really startled the receptionist but told me there were two ladies in the room down the hall. It was awkward at first as I entered the room and these two elderly ladies were so happy to see someone that as soon as I sat down they started to talk. They each told me about themselves as if we were old friends and talked about the times of their youth and their husbands passing. After a couple of hours I asked them how they liked the nursing home and both instantly started to complain about the food and how bland and tasteless it was. I thought how terrible these people have three things to look forward to and that's breakfast, lunch and dinner. I asked what their favorite food was and one said shrimp and the other fish but both agreed Long John Silvers had the best. It just so happened there was one only a couple of miles and I stepped out and asked the nurse if it was alright to go by and bring them lunch. I drove and purchased our culinary delicacies and returned to the room. You would have thought they won the lottery. They were like children as they opened up their lunch. After lunch I said my good byes and thanked them for a wonderful day.

Then it was clear I was supposed to do a dinner for a nursing home. Not just to feed them but to bless them, a gourmet meal. God put on my heart it was going to be for 120 people. It just so happened that this facility had about 120 guest staying there so this must be the place. I made an appointment with the director and told her my plans and she politely said no. I didn't understand why and she told me that they have strict dietary policies to go by and I thought I just gave them fried fish and shrimp. She told me we could do an ice cream social, then I was totally confused, but I thanked her. It must be another nursing home I thought.

A few months went by and the only job I could find was the event coordinator at the University of Kentucky, a job that was way below my qualifications, yet it was work and the only job that opened up for me. One day someone was talking about this little nursing home that had only fifty guests in it, but I checked it out anyway. It was November and I started my quest in April, sometimes God doesn't move so quickly. I made an appointment with the director and she was eager to see me. I sat down and explained I wanted to do this fancy dinner and have the people, at the church I was attending, serve it as waiters in a fancy restaurant. She almost broke out in tears and started to share how she always wanted to have a dinner for the people and allow them to bring guests. She told me there would most likely be about 120 people.

I asked the University of Kentucky if I could borrow some china and equipment I would need for the event and they were more than gracious. Unfortunately now I had no money to put this together since the funds have gone down and it was a struggle just to make our bills. So I went before the church and explained what the vision was and the whole church applauded in excitement for the opportunity.

The day arrived and the ladies in the church did an outstanding job turning a plain cement walled cafeteria into an elegant hall with all the decorations. The tables and centerpieces were beautiful, King Solomon would have been impressed. People were coming in and I had my newly acquired kitchen staff in place, along with a crew of servers dressed to the T. The dinner could not have gone any smoother, but yet my heart wasn't totally there.

You see my old ways of depression was creeping back as I stood there worrying about my bills instead of doing my job for God. Towards the end of the dinner one of the servers came up to me with tears in her eyes saying she did it. I asked what she did and she began to explain how when she

was serving one of the dinners in the room, since the lady couldn't make it to the table, she was able to share her faith. She told me the woman was surrounded by her family and she asked why the special meal. She explained that she was from the local church and wanted to share God's love with others. The lady gave her life to Jesus before dessert as her family looked on. Two o'clock the next morning that lovely lady went home to meet the One she gave her life to. Salvation for dessert, who would have guessed?

I lost my job shortly after that and months went by and the bills were piling up. One day as I was praying and asking God why, why was I there I didn't understand. I felt him saying sternly, you said you would do My will. If it is My will that you come here to save one of my children, why aren't you honored and then I remembered the lady at the dinner who gave her life to Christ. I don't think I ever felt so humbled as I did in that moment and I believe I laid on that floor crying for hours for forgiveness.

A week later I received a call from California from someone I used to work for. They were offering me a consulting job that would pay the amount I was behind on my mortgage and other bills. I accepted that position, which became permanent and continued my life in California, but this time alone.

I went back to my church home eager to get involved again. A friend of mine was active in the CARE ministry for abused children. The church would host events at the church inviting different agencies to bring kids. I hardly spent anytime with my own children and now God wanted me to be involved with children going through the worst kind of abuse. Of all things they needed a Santa for the Christmas party being held and I stepped up to the challenge. The children have been so abused that no one was allowed to hug them because they were afraid of people. Everyone except for Santa. That day I had everyone sitting on my lap from

small children to mothers going through substance abuse, seeing their children maybe for the first time in months. I was laughing and hugging everyone. It was as if I was born to do this. Maybe I was. As I would reach out for children and place them on my knee and ask what they wanted, I saw in line a little boy about four or five. He had burn marks all over his face, he had freckles and it seems as though someone tried to burn the freckles off with a cigarette. I was afraid to reach out to him and said from a distance, “what would you like for Christmas little boy.” He looked up at me and said, “I want a hug Santa.” I couldn’t hold back the tears and I reached out to him and just held him in my arms as he embraced me. His name was Mikey and I asked him to help me pass out the candy and toys to the other boys and girls. He was so excited and stuck by his new best friend Santa the rest of the day. When it was time to go home he ran up to me and gave me a big hug and told me that he loved me. I took off my gloves and glasses and handed them to him then said, “Merry Christmas,” as he got on the bus. I don’t know if Mikey will remember that day, but I sure know Santa will never forget.

I’m Santa every year and God has used me to touch others from praying with moms sitting on my lap while others waited in line, encouraging ladies that God has a plan for their life and touching the lives of children. Not bad for someone who’s a mistake.

I became a leader for children with autism at the church. It was a class held on Saturday night and I was the only man who volunteered. I remember one night as the parents were picking up their children this one lady had two sons and they were about to leave. I shouted , “hey what about me,” the two turned and wrapped their arms around me and kissed me on the cheek. I looked up and their was their mom with tears in her eyes and said, “thank you for showing my boys some love.” I found out most children with autism usually only have a mother, because the father can’t take the pressure of

dealing with a child with autism. Imagine God used someone who couldn't love anyone, even himself, to show love to those who need it.

Chapter 8

Life Isn't Easy, but Worth It

My list can go on and on how God used someone so worthless to make a difference to others. If you are still breathing, God isn't done with you. He has a plan for your life.

Jeremiah 29: [11] For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

See He doesn't need to practice, He knows exactly what He is doing, even though we may not understand. His hand was there every time I tried to end my life, knowing He still had a use for me. We're not mass produced, but each one of us is custom made and made for a purpose. Our creator took great care and thought as it states in the Psalms:

*Psalm 139:13 For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.*

*Psalm 139:14 I praise you because I am fearfully and
wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.*

*Psalm 139:15 My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place.
When I was woven together in the depths of the earth,*

*Psalm 139:16 your eyes saw my unformed body.
All the days ordained for me
were written in your book
before one of them came to be.*

Will your life be easy once you become a follower of Christ? Jesus told us we will in *John 16:33* "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

It would have been nice if Jesus said, "You might have some troubles or there is a possibility of you having troubles," but no He said we will have troubles and He is right. Like I said before I couldn't find work in Kentucky and our finances were in terrible shape. I couldn't understand why God would have me move somewhere and not bless me for obeying. He did put a scripture on my heart, it was

*Proverbs 3:5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;*

*Proverbs 3:6 in all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make your paths straight.*

I couldn't miss it, it seemed to be everywhere. There was even one Sunday during service that the pastor asked if anyone needed prayer to come up. My heart had been so troubled that I went up immediately. As the pastor was praying he said God had put on his heart Proverbs 3:5 and 6 and before he could say it, I quoted the scripture and then fell on my knees and wept out loud. I continued to borrow money from my life insurance and ran up my credit cards to the max trying to keep our bills current, but it came time when there was no more money to be had and the mortgage was coming due. It was about that time that I received a phone call from the company I used to work for in California offering me a consulting job and the salary for the job was the amount of our mortgage and two other bills that were due. After talking it over with my wife we had no other choice and I took the job. After completing the week I was asked to stay on and the amount that was offered was very generous. I went back to Kentucky and explained the offer and felt it was time for us to go back to California. She

agreed that I needed to take the job, but she wasn't ready to move back to California. I made arrangements to stay with a friend in California temporarily until things got resolved and started my new job. I had the company just mail the check to my wife so she could take care of our bills. Three months went by and I went back to Kentucky to talk with my wife. I told her she belongs with me and should come back to California. She still wasn't ready to move. I explained I couldn't stay with my friends any longer it was just too big of an imposition for them and I needed to find a place to live. I told her to send me all the bills and I would take care of them and send her money for the mortgage. We agreed to trust God in our marriage and to give it up to Him.

I moved into a small one bedroom apartment near the ocean. It used to be a motel that was converted into apartments. Every morning I would get up at two AM and walk along the beach and pray before I went to work. As time went by my depression seemed to deepen and thoughts of taking my life started coming back. Eight months went by and I was having our taxes done, since I took my wages as an I-9 without having taxes taken out, we owned a few thousand dollars. As I told my wife she told me she had another I-9 form. I asked her what it was for and she told me when her mother passed away she received several thousand from an insurance policy. I told her I needed help paying our taxes and she could either send me some of the money or I would have to stop sending money for the mortgage. She told me she wasn't going to send me any money and in two weeks a revived a letter from a lawyer. The letter stated that my wife was filing for a divorce and basically she wanted everything except the bills. I was in shock and didn't know what to do so I got on my knees immediately and asked God for direction. After I calmed myself I called my wife of over thirty-two years and asked what was going on. She told me she had no desire to move back to California and that her mother left her some money and she was going to buy the house on her own. I told her I read the letter and to make sure I was reading it

right I asked if she was asking me to give up everything we owned and for me to pay all the bills and she wanted to keep the life insurance policy while I still paid for it. She told me that is what she was asking plus four hundred dollars a month. I told her I would have to get back to her. I continued to pray on what I should do and God put on my heart *1 Timothy 5: [8] If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.* I called her back and told her I will agree to everything except the four hundred dollars a month and that she can have all the possessions and I will take the liability of paying all the debt, but I didn't feel it was right that I should continue to give her money and she agreed immediately. I then told her I think what she was doing is wrong and that we should not be getting this divorce, however no matter what I would be there for her. She then told me she did need something from me and I asked her what it was. She told me they needed to fax the title of the house as soon as the divorce was final so she could keep the interest rate on the loan she got. It took only two weeks before the divorce was final. I remember the day before the hearing in Kentucky and my wife called me. I again told her she shouldn't be doing this and that God hated divorce, but all she could say was where do you want the papers faxed to?

All I could think was Okay God now what am I suppose to be doing? Have you ever been there? You think you're doing what is right, you're serving in the church, being a good example at work, praying and studying your Bible, yet life is not going the way you feel it should. It should be easier, right? Where's the blessings Lord? I remember every morning I still got up at two AM to pray and as I walked I got to a particular place and asked God just to take me now. Bring me home Lord I would cry, but I added something new to my plea. I said not my will, but yours be done. My problem was that I was looking at my life through my eyes, not God's. As time went by I was at church doing the food

ministry on Saturday night. A woman that worked the ministry asked me how I was doing and I explained I was having a rough time. I knew this lady from volunteering at the church, but never knew her name. Teri was her name and she was one of those people who loved to serve, but always in the background serving with a humble heart. Teri said if I ever needed someone to talk to, our have a meal with she would be available. I took her up on her offer and we had breakfast one Sunday morning. It was a wonderful time as Teri listened patiently and told me a little about herself. I asked if we could do this again and she consented. There was something so special about Teri, it was wonderful just to be with her. She would share about her life and her love for God. She had so much more faith then I did. She became my best friend, someone I could talk to openly about how I was feeling and what I was going through. To make a long story short after a year we were married at the church we served in. I could never love anyone the way I love Teri. I look forward to seeing her each day and there is something so special about serving along side with her. God has given me this unbelievable blessing to remind me of His love for me. So now when Satan knocks at my door and tries to enter my thoughts, all I need to do is think of Teri, because she reminds me of God's love for me.

I would like to tell you that was the last trial I had to endure but I'm afraid I'll be going through them until I get to go home. Only a few months after the marriage I got very sick and wasn't sure I was going to make it, we had to put Teri's dog to sleep, the company I was working at sold and I was out of a job and we lost our home.

However I have never gone back to the deep pit of depression. The difference now is my focus is on my maker. When the enemy pulls me toward the pit, God is pulling me towards His grace. You see now I have the memories of the people that were touched because God allows this life to go on and I want to see what else He has in store for me. You

only throw away what is worthless and once you see the value you treasure it. Allow God to open up your eyes to the treasure He has put into your life so that you may treasure it almost as much as God does. There is a saying, "God can't guide your steps until you move your feet." He has so many blessings for us, but He is not a Pizza Hut God. He doesn't deliver while you are sitting at home, you have to get up and pick up the blessings. That's right, blessing so numerous it would be hard to count. Unfortunately, God will not force us on the path, He will, however, guide us if we'll let Him.

By the way, like all the other saints of the Bible, God has restored to me so much more. He healed me from sickness, made me stronger through the trials, opened doors for better work and has blessed me with the most wonderful woman ever to be my wife.

I start each day thanking God for all He has given me, and all of the ways He has blessed my life, and the list continues to grow. How do you avoid depression's fiery darts?

Ephesians 6:[16] In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

When I look around, I see things in a totally different light. There is a great quote by Albert Einstein, "There are two ways to look at life, one as if there are no miracles, and the other as if everything is a miracle." Choose the latter.

*1 Corinthians 2:[9] However, as it is written:
"No eye has seen,
no ear has heard,
no mind has conceived
what God has prepared for those who love him"* --*

Chapter 9

Just As God Intended

Have you ever wondered why you're here or if there is any purpose for your existence? Do you ever feel like I did as if God made a mistake and the world would be better off without you? If you ever felt that way you need to see yourself through the eyes of God. Just think, the creator of all designed you exactly the way you are. He didn't need the practice, He knows exactly what He is doing, and He makes no mistakes.

*Psalm 139:13 For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.*

*Psalm 139:14 I praise you because I am fearfully and
wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.*

There is a purpose for our existence and a reason you are exactly the way you are. God has a plan for you. You need to see yourself through God's eyes and ask Him what He desires of you. You can't pound a nail in with a can opener or open a can with a hammer. Each tool is designed for a specific purpose. It is the same with us. Unless we are doing what we are created to do, we are not going to be much use to ourselves, others or God, but when we do discover our purpose, the world will open up to us.

God has given each of us gifts and talents to be used in a specific way for a reason. We have been created to make a difference and an impact in this world and each one of us has a unique role, which only we can fill as God intended.

Romans 12: [6] We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. [7] If it is serving, let him serve; if it

is teaching, let him teach; [8] if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

Depression is the focus of negative feelings like uselessness, hopelessness, confusion, anger, sadness, hatred and other useless emotions. However, when we are busy living our life the way God has intended, we don't have the time to be depressed.

God sees something we don't see in ourselves. He sees someone He can love, use and care for. He sees someone that can make a difference in this world and if you'll spend time with Him He'll show you that person. God makes no exceptions.

At a fund-raising dinner for a school that serves learning-disabled children, the father of one of the school's students delivered a speech that would never be forgotten by all who attended.

After extolling the school and its dedicated staff, he offered a question. "Everything God does is done with perfection. Yet, my son, Shay, cannot learn things as other children do. He cannot understand things as other children do. Where is God's plan reflected in my son?"

The audience was stilled by the query. The father continued. "I believe," the father answered, "that when God brings a child like Shay into the world, an opportunity to realize the Divine Plan presents itself. And it comes in the way people treat that child."

Then, he told this story:

Shay and I had walked past a park where some boys Shay knew were playing baseball. Shay asked, "Do you think they

will let me play?” I knew that most boys would not want him on their team. But I understood that if my son were allowed to play it would give him a much-needed sense of belonging. I approached one of the boys on the field and asked if Shay could play. The boy looked around for guidance from his teammates. Getting none, he took matters into his own hands and said, “We are losing by six runs, and the game is in the eighth inning. I guess he can be on our team and we’ll try to put him up to bat in the ninth inning.”

In the bottom of the eighth inning, Shay’s team scored a few runs but was still behind by three. At the top of the ninth inning, Shay put on a glove and played in the outfield. Although no hits came his way, he was obviously ecstatic just to be on the field, grinning from ear to ear as I waved to him from the stands.

In the bottom of the ninth inning, Shay’s team scored again. Now, with two outs and bases loaded, the potential winning run was on base. Shay was scheduled to be the next at-bat. Would the team actually let Shay bat at this juncture and give away their chance to win the game? Surprisingly, Shay was given the bat. Everyone knew that a hit was all but impossible because Shay didn’t even know how to hold a bat properly, much less connect with the ball. However, as Shay stepped up to the plate, the pitcher moved up a few steps to lob the ball softly so Shay could at least be able to make contact. The first pitch came and Shay swung clumsily and missed. The pitcher again took a few steps forward to toss the ball softly toward Shay. As the pitch came in, Shay swung at the ball and hit a slow ground ball to the pitcher. The pitcher picked up the soft grounder and could easily have thrown the ball to the first baseman. Shay would have been out and that would have ended the game. Instead the pitcher took the ball and threw it on a high arc to right field, far beyond the reach of the first baseman. Everyone started yelling, “Shay run to first. Run to first.” Never in his life had Shay ever made it to first base. He scampered down the

baseline, wide-eyed and startled. Everyone yelled, "Run to second, run to second!" By the time Shay was rounding first base, the right fielder had the ball. He could have thrown the ball to the second baseman for a tag. But the right fielder understood what the pitcher's intentions had been, so he threw the ball high and far over the third baseman's head. Shay ran towards second base as the runners ahead of him deliriously circled the bases towards home. As Shay reached second base, the opposing shortstop ran to him, turned him in the direction of third base, and shouted, "Run to third!" As Shay rounded third, the boys from both teams were screaming, "Shay! Run home!" Shay ran home, stepped on home plate and was cheered as the hero, for hitting a "grand slam" and winning the game for his team.

"That day," the boys from both teams helped bring a piece of the Divine Plan for my son into this world.

Don't cheat the world out of the gift God asks you to give.

Acts 20: [35] ..., remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' "

Chapter 10

The Only Thing You Can Bring to Heaven Is People

We are still here in this fallen world, so what are we suppose to be doing? Jesus made it clear in *Matthew 28: [19] Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

We are to go out and tell others about Jesus because *John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.* That's how much God loves us and now He wants to use us to bring the rest of His children to Him. Each one of us will do it in a different way, using the gifts and abilities that God has given us along with situations to put us next to those He want us to tell. One of the gifts we will use is our testimony. Most people won't go to church to hear about Jesus, but will listen to what He has done in your life. Paul says it best in 2 *Corinthians 1:3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, [4] who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. [5] For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. [6] If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. [7] And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.* People will relate to other people that have gone through what they are going through. If you suffer from drug addiction you are more likely to listen to someone who suffered with the same addiction. Our testimony can be our most powerful witnessing tool; I know it is for me. There are certain people out there that might only hear about the gospel because

of who you are and what you have gone through. We will not always see the harvest, we may be the one that plants the seed or one that waters it instead of reaping the reward of seeing someone receive Jesus as Lord and Savior. I've talked to a lot of people and gave out hundreds of books and it won't be until I get to heaven that I'll see the harvest from what God has allowed me to do. However there has been a few times that God has allowed me to see the planting and the harvest.

The first time I spoke was in the church where I received Jesus as my Lord and Savior. A year after I was saved I spoke for just a few minutes sharing what God had done in my life. Afterwards I stood at the door as the people were leaving shaking hands or giving an occasional hug. A woman came up to me, still with tears in her eyes and gave me a hug. "I wish my husband were here today to hear your testimony," she said. Taking a deep breath she went on saying he committed suicide six months ago, he was suffering from depression. I think if he heard what you said today, he might still be here, as she started to cry again. I felt helpless as I held her in my arms. I just wanted her pain to go away. A young pregnant woman then came up, with tears in her eyes. "Thank you, thank you," she said and gave me a huge hug. The father of my baby was here with me today and he suffers from depression, he told me he didn't think that he was going to live long enough to see their baby. You touched his heart, she said then began to cry again and held my hand. Just then the man came up with sunglasses on. He took the glasses off and his eyes were red and puffy from crying. As soon as he saw me he started crying again and I reached out and hugged him. My life really was changing. I never cried and hugged so much in my life. He held me tight and simply said, "thank you." I said, "Don't thank me, thank Jesus. He's already saved me and brought me joy. Let him do the same for you." I couldn't believe how I was talking. If someone told me a few months earlier what I would be doing and the people I would be helping I would have had them locked up for insanity. We went outside and talked for a while, I wrote down my phone number in case he needed someone to

talk to, even though I made sure to let him know that Jesus was always there ready to listen. Each service went well and I couldn't believe I was standing in front of that many people sharing my testimony.

Each week, when I went to church I saw that young couple. A couple of weeks went by where I didn't see them and started to feel concerned. The following week they both returned, holding in their arms a small baby girl. I went up to them after service for an introduction of the new addition to their family. The young man pulled the blanket away from her face and said, "This is Sarah. Sarah this is the man that helped save daddy's life." God was able to use a man that had no desire to live to save someone else. Each week I saw that proud father as he carried his child, a child he thought he would never see. He was a constant reminder that I could be used and in God's eyes I was something special.

A few years later I felt called to Kentucky and I knew it was God because I didn't want to go. I prayed with everyone to make sure this was God's will including each pastor at the church. My best friend, Mark, told me it didn't make sense since everything was going well here in California and I thought great let's pray. After we prayed he looked at me and said, sure going to miss you buddy. Our house sold in a day for more than we asked for, which gave us some extra money and my wife went ahead to find a home. When I arrived in Kentucky I felt as if I should go to a nursing home. There was one close by and I went to the receptionist and asked if there was anyone that might want some company. A heartbreaking statistic is that seventy percent of all people who go into a nursing home don't receive any visitors. She directed me to a room where there were two lovely ladies and I introduced myself. They started talking right away as if we knew each other for years. It was lunch time and I asked them what their favorite food was and one said shrimp and the other fish, but they both agreed Long John Silver's had the best. There happened to be one down the street so I asked permission from the nurse to buy lunch for

them. When I got back we all had lunch and I asked what they disliked the most about being at the nursing home and they both said in unison, the food is terrible. Right then God put on my heart I was going to do a fancy dinner for all the guests in a nursing home and He even made it clear it was going to be about 120 people. It just so happened this nursing home had about 120 people staying there so I thought this was a no brainer. I made an appointment with the dietician and she told me no, that they had to maintain certain dietary guidelines. I explained this was going to be a fancy dinner, but she still said no.

Time passed and I was having a difficult time finding a job and money was running low. I finally found a job as the assistant catering manager for the University of Kentucky, a job I was well over qualified for, but at least it was something. I wasn't making enough to pay the bills so I was slowly going further and further in debt, borrowing money from life insurance policies and running up credit card debt. I was falling back into depression more focused on my problems than why God had me there. Every once in a while I would remember about the dinner for the nursing home and visit one from time to time with no luck. One day several months later someone told me about this small nursing home with only 50 residents and I thought to myself that can't be it, but made an appointment with manager of the home. I talked to her and told her my vision for this dinner. I described the menu of braised beef tenderloin, roasted garlic potatoes and fresh green beans and homemade desserts. She was so excited and began to cry. She explained that she has wanted to do a dinner where the residents could invite guests and she told me it would be for about 120 people all together. I almost fell out of my chair when she told me the number. I started my quest in April and now it's November, getting close to Christmas. I had no money for food and approached the pastor of our church. The pastor had me go before the church and explain the vision and the people were excited. People donated more than enough money, talents and their precious time. The University allowed me to borrow all

the equipment and dinnerware I would need. It was just a couple of weeks before Christmas and the ladies from the church converted a plain cinder block walled room into a festive and beautiful dining room. They brought gifts for each resident and centerpieces that would take your breath away, everything was so beautiful. I had my church family each dress up in black pants, white shirt, ties and a black apron, even our pastor was a waiter for the night. The room was filled with the residents and their guests and everyone was treated as royalty, as if Jesus himself was there (and He was). The food came out perfect and served hot to each guest. Another statistic is that ninety percent of all residents of a nursing home live less than a year. So this would be the last Christmas for most that attended that night, but what a night. Unfortunately I wasn't enjoying this magnificent evening as much as everyone else since I was slipping back into depression, focused on my problems more than what God was trying to show me. After serving all the meals one of the ladies from our church came up to me crying saying, "I did it, I did it". I asked what she did and she told me she witnessed to someone and that they received Jesus as Lord and Savior. You see some of the guests couldn't make it to the table that night they were restricted to their bed so some of the meals were served in their rooms. The lady that was restricted to her bed asked why they were doing this and her server explained about the love of God and how they wanted others to see His love through them. In front of her family she received the greatest gift ever. The next day was Sunday and our pastor told the congregation that the nursing home supervisor called and told him that woman who was saved went home to the Lord that morning at 2 am.

A couple of months went by and my job at the university was eliminated so I was out of work again. We were in dire straits with the mortgage coming due and nowhere else to borrow. I was in my room crying and shouting at God, "why is this happening to me?" I did what you told me to do and everything is going wrong. As I was lying on the floor feeling sorry for myself it was as if God reached down and grabbed me and said,

“I thought you wanted to do my will. If I wanted you to go to Kentucky to bring one my children home to me why aren’t you honored?” I never felt so ashamed. I was so busy looking at me I couldn’t see Him and what He was doing through me. A couple of days later I received a phone call from a company in California I use to work for. They wanted to hire me as a consultant and would fly me out. My first week’s paycheck would be enough to pay my house payment and a couple of other bills I would be behind in. The job became permanent and moved me back to California. Even though I forgot about God He never forgot about me.

I gave my testimony several years later at my church in California. Afterwards when I was in the lobby a young lady 23 years old came up to me with tears in her eyes. I prayed with her and gave her my email address to contact me. She wrote me saying the night she came to church was going to be her last night. She suffers from a rare condition that causes her pain most of the time and she found out she would never have children and because of what she was going through her long time boyfriend left her. A friend invited her to church that night and since he was so insistent she went. A couple of days later I received this email from her:

Hi Mark,

This is Ashley from Calvary Chapel Oceanside. I spoke to you briefly on Sunday after the first service and you said it would be okay to give you a call if I ever wanted to talk....Well, I want to talk. I want to share my story with you. But I decided to send you an email, mainly because I'm a much better writer than I am when I talk. But anyway, I guess I can date back the beginning of my depression to about 4 years ago when I was 19. I had just been to a gynecologist and given some pretty grim news. I followed doctors orders and found myself in the middle of a girls medical nightmare. But during that time, I also began to date a guy who took very good care of me. I was pretty sure that this man was Mr. Right, the one I had been

waiting for. As my medical problems seemed to be getting worse so was my relationship with my boyfriend. It was over. He said I had become too much to handle. My mood swings, the dangerous things he caught me doing (I tried committing suicide by swallowing pills by this point two times I think). When he broke up with me, I was sure that my life was over. The man that I had given everything I had too just left me. There was nothing left to live for. The years I have spent struggling with doctors, and surgeries, and pain was all for nothing. Did I mention that there was nothing left to live for? So, without a second thought I ran to my kitchen and found a bottle of rum, then ran to my bathroom and found a bottle of prescription pain killers. With both in my hand, I turned on the TV in my living room and gulped down both like I was snacking on Doritos and a Pepsi. I passed out...but hours later, woke up. With a wicked hangover and an awful stomach ache, I realized it didn't work. To be honest, I don't quite remember how it happened, what I said, or who I talked to, but I knew I needed help. I got myself to the emergency room and from there was put into a 3 day hold at the nuero psychological ward at UCI. I was given anti-depressants, diagnosed bi-polar, released on that third day, and they said I was cured! As long as I took that medication, depression would never bother me again. But it did....my medical problems were only getting worse. To the point where simple things like walking, tying my shoe, or getting in the car was excruciating pain. I COULDN'T TAKE IT ANYMORE! But then I met a new guy...(a guy who I tried dating but soon realized we should only be friends) and he told me about this really awesome place called church. I had attended church before and even liked it....but beyond my Sunday visits that was it. So I started attending with him. For Christmas he bought me a beautiful study bible and told me I should read it! The thought of actually reading the bible had never crossed my mind up until that point...he even told me that he thought through God's strength I might even be able to get off of my medication. So I did! He also told me that maybe I should pray...pray for strength, and joy, and maybe even ask the Lord to give my medical team wisdom. So I did these

things...and it helped. I felt happier than I had in awhile. But my physical pain was still worsening! And it was the Friday night before I met you this past Sunday that I had told this friend that I didn't want to be a Christian anymore. My new found passion for the Lord is over. I couldn't stand to love a God who watched me suffer. But he asked me to come to church on Sunday anyway. So I did it. Not for me, not for Jesus, but for him. And then you came up on stage....and I cried. A lot. I had been entertaining the thought of a bottle of rum and a bottle of pain killers again. I had been thinking about getting back on my anti-depressants. But you know what? I am pretty sure that God sent you up on that stage for me. I read your book last night. I circled words, underlined scripture, highlighted sentences. I am so excited to be alive. Not because my life is going great. In fact, it's pretty bad right now. I am still sad and I still have medical issues. But for the very first time ever I have given ALL control of my life to the Lord. I read and re-read Jeremiah 29:11 and I actually feel joy! I am not sure what my life holds, where my 'diagnoses' will lead me, and the struggles I am going to face but I quote a very wise man when I say that I will not cheat the world out of the gift God asks me to give. I now know the secret to getting over my depression...I will stop making it all about me. I am going to start making it all about God. I thank God for you. I thank God that you had to go through all of that because your testimony has given me mine. I know that being a true Christian is going to be an uphill battle, but as weak as I am...I'm ready. I would be lying if I said I am so much better, but for the first time I see a light at the end of the tunnel, and that hope is enough for me to keep carrying on. Thank you, Mark...I am now ready to get over depression.

My testimony began a change in her and she wanted to let God guide her life. My advice to her was to find out what gifts and talents God has given her and use them for His glory. She told me she always had a heart for the junior high kids and she was going back to her church further up north to volunteer her time. My wife and I kept in touch with her and one day she asked if

she could come over and bring a friend. Here she had been seeing the leader of the junior high ministry and wanted us to meet him. They were married a few months later and God has touched her body and diminished her pain. They adopted a baby a year after they were married, his name is John. Just recently I received a letter from her, she was going to Africa on a mission trip. If you would go to her Face Book page you can see she gives all the glory to our Lord. Another testimony to be used for God's glory.

So how does God want to use you? The only way to find out is let Him. Jesus said in *John 10: [10]* *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.* Using what God has given you for His glory is living life to the full. There are so many people out in this world suffering and headed for the destination of hell. You might be their only hope and no matter what the results might be you honored God with your choice to use your gifts.

Chapter 11

We Need to Be Homesick

My wife and I took a mission trip to an orphanage in Mexico. It was an awesome experience and at the end of each day our group would sit around a campfire for a devotional. The one night I was asked to lead the devotional and God placed on my heart what He wanted me to discuss. I started by going around the group and asking each person, “When I say heaven, what comes to your mind?” I also gave them an opportunity to pass if they couldn’t think of something right away. The first couple of people passed, then the next said Jesus, then another love, but no one gave an answer as if heaven was on their mind.

I explained we had only been there for a couple of days without taking a shower and sleeping in tents and that I was already homesick. I’ve been thinking of a nice hot shower, comfortable bed, relaxing on the couch, going to the kitchen whenever I wanted to get something to eat and other comforts I missed. Yet I live in a world where sin is accepted, hate outweighs love, sexual immorality is just an alternative lifestyle, pollution, corruption, sickness and lust. This is truly Satan’s playground. I know when my time is up on this earth it will be time to go home, a beautiful place, too beautiful to be able to be described in this present world, where I’m going to live with the one person who loves me more than anyone could for all eternity, but it hardly crosses my mind. How can I get so homesick for a temporary home on this earth and not homesick for my eternal home?

A couple of days after we returned from Mexico I was talking with someone and told them about my devotional on heaven and she asked if I had ever read a book by Randy Alcorn called, “Heaven”. I told her I never heard of it and she loaned me her copy. It was the most amazing and wonderful book, with the exception of the Bible, that I had ever read. Using scripture the book explains what heaven will be like and it was so reassuring and exciting I couldn’t put it down.

When we are depressed we give up hope and even the possibility of becoming happy, because we are unable to imagine that. That is also why we don't think of heaven, because we don't know what it's going to be like. Some of us have images of doing nothing for all eternity in a constant state of peaceful bliss, how boring is that? Some think we will be just spirit beings like the angels, others picture themselves just sitting around worshipping God and others may think we will have a mindless existence and will have no desire to do anything except what we will be programmed to do. No wonder we don't look forward to going home.

Randy Alcorn's book however paints a totally different place, a place you where you can't wait to come home to. *2 Peter 3: [13] But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.*

Again using scripture the book explains if we were to pass away now we would be with Jesus in paradise, like the thief that was crucified next to Jesus. *Luke 23:43 Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."* This will be a wonderful place, but not our eternal home. Mr. Alcorn explains that our family and friends who have gone ahead will be able to see us, we will recognize people when we get there and we will have a purpose that involves the gifts and abilities God has given us on earth.

Revelations 21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. [2] I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. [3] And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. [4] He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

Revelations 21:5 He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

The really exciting part for me was when Jesus returns and sets up His Kingdom He is going to make a new heaven and earth. Imagine a new heaven and earth without any sin, brand new with no destruction and we each get to start at the beginning in the presence of God. We will have a new and perfect body. *Philippians 3:[20] But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, [21] who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.* We will recognize our loved ones, we will get to meet people we only read about in history books and the Bible, we will remember what we did on earth and we will have a job to do, the job we were created to do from the beginning. The book goes into detail of what we might expect in our new home *John 14:[2] In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.* Other questions the book answers are: will we actually rule with Christ, Will there be space and time, will we have the sun, moon, oceans and weather, will we be ourselves, what will our bodies be like, will we eat and drink, what will our daily lives be, who will we meet, will there be animals, will we see our pets again, and so many more questions will be answered.

In the book, Heaven is a section entitled A Word to the Depressed and it reads as follows.

The fact that heaven will be wonderful shouldn't tempt us to take shortcuts to get there. If you're depressed, you may imagine your life has no purpose-but you couldn't be more wrong.

As long as God keeps you here on Earth, it's exactly where He wants you. He's preparing you for another world. He knows precisely what He's doing. Through your suffering, difficulty, and depression, he's expanding your capacity for eternal joy. Our lives on earth are a training camp to ready us for Heaven. I know depression can be debilitating. Many godly people have experienced it. But if you are considering taking your own life, recognize this as the devil's temptation. Jesus said that Satan is a liar and a murderer (John 8:44). He tells lies because he

wants to destroy you (1 Peter 5:8). Don't listen to the liar. Listen to Jesus, the truth teller (John 8:32; 14:6). Don't make a terrible ending to your life's story-finish your God given course on Earth. When He's done-not before-he'll take you home in his own time and way. Meanwhile, God has a purpose for you here on this earth. Don't desert your post.

If you don't know Jesus, confess your sins and embrace his death and resurrection on your behalf. If you don't know him, make your daily decisions in light of your destiny. Ask yourself what you can do today, next week, next year, or decades from now to write the best ending to this volume of your life's story-a story that will continue gloriously in the new universe.

By God's grace, use the time you have left on the present Earth to store up for yourself treasures on the new earth, to be laid at Christ's feet for his glory (Revelations 4:10). Then look forward to meeting in Heaven Jesus himself. As well as those touched by your Christ-exalting choices.

Psalm 37:10 A little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found. 11 But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace.

So why are you still here? Because God is giving you a chance to store up treasures and earn rewards that will last for all eternity.

Ephesians 2: [10] For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

1 Peter 2: [12] Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

Psalm 62:12 and that you, O Lord, are loving.

Surely you will reward each person
according to what he has done.

Isaiah 49:4 But I said, "I have labored to no purpose;

I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing.

Yet what is due me is in the LORD's hand,
and my reward is with my God."

Jeremiah 32: [19] great are your purposes and mighty are your deeds. Your eyes are open to all the ways of men; you reward everyone according to his conduct and as his deeds deserve.

Matthew 5: [12] Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Colossians 3 [24] since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

Revelations 22:12 "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.

We will only be here on this earth for a little while longer before going home. I remember when my parents would go on vacation and my sister and I stayed home with our grandparents. We couldn't wait until they came home, because they would bring us back something from their journey. When you get home what will you bring home from your journey to your Father? Will it be something priceless like a life lived for Him, doing His will? I so desperately want to hear my Lord say to me *Matthew 25:21 "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'*

We will get to experience Eden like Adam and Eve, only this time without the sin. When you think about it, it makes sense for God doesn't make mistakes and so many think that the Garden of Eden was a mistake, because of what Adam and Eve did, but how else could God find those who would truly love and trust Him. He choose those who through the trials and tribulations of this life and the sin of this world still said I trust you Father and thank you for the sacrifice of your Son so that I may call this home with you.

Chapter 11

Lessons I Learned about Conquering Depression

Each day I read the Bible to gain a better understanding of what it is God wants me to do. It's amazing how relevant the Bible is, after thousands of years. I found answers for each of my questions, and explanations of how I could combat and conquer depression in my life. These are some of the lessons I've learned through the word of God.

Take the focus off myself

My life changed when I focused on the One that created me instead of on myself. Each day I thought of all the things I didn't have, all the things I wanted to have, the way I thought I should feel, why I wasn't like someone else or just daydreaming of the person I wanted to be. Because of that focus when I compared myself to others I had feelings of insecurity, pride or inferiority, anger, hopelessness, confusion and the list went on. Someone asked Jesus

Mathew 22:36 "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" or what is the most important thing we should do? Mathew 22:37 Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." [38] This is the first and greatest commandment. [39] And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.**

God is telling us not to live our life with the focus on ourselves but on Him and the well being of others.

Philippians 2: [3] Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. [4] Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

I learned that if I focused on God and others, God's focus was on me, and I was no longer a slave of my destructive thoughts.

There are no coincidences

A coincidence is nothing more than a miracle that God didn't get the credit for. I always took for granted all the miracles in my life, things seemed to happen at just the right time. I can look back now and see how God worked in my life to bring me to where I am now. Today I look for the miracles, and make sure God gets all the credit He deserves.

Job 5:9 He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted.

How many times in your own life has something happened unexpectedly, something that needed to happen just when it did? If you want to see more miracles, you need to get to know the miracle maker.

Get involved with people

In the food service business, I was always around people but never involved with them. At the end of my day I went home, had dinner and turned on the television. No matter how many people I was with whether family, friends or work associates I felt alone. I was never involved. God created us all to be part of one body giving us certain gifts to build up others.

Romans 12: [4] Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, [5] so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

At my church I started to get involved in things that were happening. I helped with the Easter Sunrise Service, and in

the Garden of Eatin food service I became a host and greeter and partnered in the Thanksgiving dinner for the homeless. I also helped with Autumnfest, an alternative to Halloween for children. I took classes at the church, baptized others at the beach baptism, organized a dinner for the pastors and staff, and played Santa Claus for the child care ministry. I was a leader and a coach for small groups, and got involved in anything else I could find. All those hours I used to throw away watching television, became precious moments that I'll never forget.

Give to Others

Most of my life I rarely gave to any charity, and when I did, it was very little. It would be unusual for me to give a hundred dollars or more in a year to any cause. My philosophy was what's mine is mine, and what I didn't have, I borrowed. I went bankrupt twice and was deeply in debt most of my life. I began giving one tenth of everything we made to God. I also gave free will offerings, donated to other charities, gave anonymously to people in need. I spent a couple of hundred dollars on toys each year for under privileged kids during Christmas. That year I gave over twelve thousand dollars, and I was making over twenty thousand dollars a year less than I made in Ohio, and our house payment was over three times as much. The next year the only debt I had was our home, car and one credit card with a one thousand dollar balance. The only answer I could come up with was the one I found in

Luke 6:38 Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

God didn't only bless us with finances, but He blessed me with contentment. I was pleased with the man I was becoming, and I no longer needed all the stuff I use to buy.

Trust the One who's truly trustworthy

Trusting people who were less than trustworthy burned me several times in my life, and I'm sure you have had the same experience. In the beginning, it was even difficult to trust God. I discovered that without complete trust, I couldn't move forward in my relationship with God.

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

Live in the Present

The phrase, "Yesterday is history, tomorrow a mystery, and today is a gift that's why it's called the present." Helped to change me. That was the complete opposite of what I was doing. I spent most of my life worrying about what I had done or about what was going to happen, I never really enjoyed each moment. Jesus said in

Mathew 6: 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

I know this scripture by itself is not the most encouraging, but it's true that we are going to have troubles, but as they come, we are to give them to God. Our God realizes this life is too difficult for us to handle, and He didn't intend for us to handle it on our own. If you have a list of things you worry about, turn it into a prayer list. He wants to guide us, take those burdens from us, and show us the way.

Mathew 11: 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."

Have an Attitude of Gratitude

God used thanksgiving to begin the process of healing. When I was truly thankful for what I had, I wasn't focused on the things I thought I should have. My emotions went from anger and rejection to happiness and joy.

Philippians 4: 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

If you're focusing on all the blessings God has given you, you won't have time to see anything else.

Listen before Speaking

Most of my life, I had to be the one to speak. I needed to be the center of attention. During conversations I wouldn't listen, I waited to find the opportunity to put my two cents in. So many times I said the wrong things, harmful words and make stupid comments I couldn't take back. The old saying "Sticks and stones will break your bones but words can never hurt me," simply is not true. I've been hurt many times by the words others have spoken to me, and in turn, I have hurt others with mine.

Proverbs 15:4 "The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life, but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit."

Start each day out Right

I've read several self-help books, and each one tells you to start your day in a positive way. Some tell you to ask yourself positive questions, to say uplifting things to yourself, to shout as soon as you get out of bed that today is going to be a great day, and other similar incentives. I agree that the way we start our day is very important, and it sets the mood for the entire day. I found that starting each day with

my Lord in prayer and reading the Bible was the key to my recovery. I needed to spend that time thanking Him, learning from Him, speaking to Him, and listening to Him to know what He wanted me to do. When you spend time with God like this, you begin to realize who you are speaking to, and how mighty He really is. What if you were going out to play basketball with some of your friends and you knew you had Michael Jordan on your team, would you be concerned about losing?

Jeremiah 29: 12 Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. 13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

Pride is not an asset

I always thought that having pride in yourself was a necessity for a happy life. I found out that pride is actually just the opposite.

Proverbs 29:23 A man's pride brings him low, but a man of lowly spirit gains honor.

Pride forces you to try to live up to your own expectations, and when you don't meet them you either lower others to elevate yourself, or go into depression because you fall short. I use to look up to those who use to boast about being self-made men, but the Lord showed me that I'm so much more, I'm a God made man.

1 Corinthians 1: 31 Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

Humility and weakness are Virtues

This was an unusual lesson for me to learn, because in our society, the humble and weak are the ones everyone walks

on. I never saw anyone brag about how weak they were until I read the Bible when Paul said in

2 Corinthians 12 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. Then in Psalms 25:9 He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way.

I look back on my life and it made sense to me. I was so full of myself I didn't want to hear or learn anything else. When I was able to admit I had a long way to go but didn't have the strength to go any further, that's when He carried me so I could proceed on my journey.

Never compare Myself to Others

I used to compare myself to a person that I wanted to be like, then get depressed because I realized how far I was from becoming like that person. Other times I compared myself to someone that didn't have the things I had and fill myself with pride at their expense. I was so busy analyzing others, that I didn't notice the person God had made in me. *Ephesians 2: 10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.* I love this scripture because it tells me God has made me and he made me for a purpose.

Desire to Pass the Test

James 1:12 Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

Let's say you will live to be eighty years old. Do you realize that you can't even compare how short one second is to eighty years, as eighty years is to eternity? I thought that was all there was to this life. A survey was taken and ninety-five

percent of the people polled believe there is a heaven. I always believed there was a heaven, but didn't live my life as if I were going there. Is there anything you wouldn't do for just one second to make the rest of your life absolutely perfect?

I have a Purpose

The question that went through my thoughts so often was, "Why am I here, what purpose do I have?" When I couldn't come up with an answer, I went into my deepest depression and made several suicide attempts. If something doesn't have a purpose, we throw it away. So many times I wanted to throw away what I believed to be useless.

Psalms 57:2 I cry out to God Most High, to God, who fulfills his purpose for me.

I was continually trying to find the purpose in my life, as if it was this one great thing. Now, each day, I discover a new reason God has me here. It may be as simple as listening to someone and helping him or her through their day. Who knows, I might come up with a cure for cancer. I now rest comfortably in knowing that no matter what comes along, I'm living according to God's plan. I stand on God's promise each day

Jeremiah 29: 11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Who would you rather have running your life, you or our almighty Father? Allow God to take hold of your life, and enjoy the journey.

The Designer of My Life

One day and I can't tell you when I sat down and wrote this poem that sums up my bout with depression and where I'm heading now.

I sat on the sand with the ocean mist on my face
Overlooking the water as the waves rolled in.
I looked back on the plans I had made for my life
Plans that created sorrow, pain and emptiness in my soul,
Plans that took hope and love and lead them astray.
Today is the day I will ease my suffering,
Today will be the last I'll look out over the sea.
Today will be the last I'll hear the roar of the water,
Today will end the disappointment of my life.
As I sat on the sand, I lifted my bottle of poison
Toasting to the heavens the end of a useless existence,
Speaking to God, as if I knew what to say,
Talking to my creator even though I don't pray.
I Asked Him to take this life He created
While listing good deeds to keep me from hell
I understood I was unworthy to be in His place.
Whether it be for salvation or for damnation,
A life like mine should not be preserved for all eternity.
Hoping for mercy not wanting to be judged,
But craving the comfort of sleep without end
My life, a creation of God, was quite simply a mistake.
A mistake when corrected would never be missed,
A mere blemish removed from His majestic plan
As I sat on the rock, I lifted my poison high,
I took it in with anxious anticipation, and said my last goodbye
My body started to shake, my head was about to explode
The sky turned dark and the life I hated, suddenly came to an end.
Yet...light comes to my eyes once again, to my dismay
Where was I, where did I end up?

As I looked up, I saw the family I thought I left behind
As I lay in that hospital bed wondering what to do,
I heard a voice like a crash of thunder in the night:
“I have created all things under heaven and above
Each one is made uniquely with thought and with love
Each creation is here for a purpose, there are no mistakes.
Unlike all other living things, I have given you the gift of
choice.
I have allowed you to make plans and choose your own path.
The choices you have made have lead you astray
I will not make you submit to my will,
You must make the decision, and choose to follow me
You were created with a plan I designed for solely you
You only need to ask, and I will lead you on that path
I didn't create life for you to live it alone,
I wanted to be part of the journey and come right along
Now close your eyes and your mouth, open your heart
Allow me to show you the plans I've had for you from the start
Speak to me each morning and I'll guide you on your path
Allow me to carry your burdens and lighten your load.
All I ask is that you love me as I have loved you,
Then I will reveal to you the plans I have for you.
Plans to prosper you, not to harm you, plans to give you hope
and a future.
From that day on, a life once filled with pain is now full of joy
A life I thought was useless now has purpose
Where I saw myself as a misfit, now I see myself as unique
Instead of living life for me, I live it for Him
Each morning I ask God what plans He has for me today
For now I live with the guidance of the designer of my life