

Real Life Stories

First Responders Edition (1)

Real People in
Real Places with
Real Problems
Looking for a Real Answer

*People so Real that it could be someone
you know.*

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CHAPTER 1

My Roof Top Encounter

I became a cop.

Traumatic situations on the job would trigger something in me.

My precinct was filled with violence drugs and a lot of other crimes.

What I witnessed as a cop on the street started getting to me.

I became very aggressive and even hostile with perps and other officers.

I felt like a soda bottle ready to blow!

As a kid, I thought I had a pretty normal life. I was very athletic and played baseball, hockey, and a lot of other sports. This occupied most of my time. As I started going through puberty, I noticed some changes in my body and also in my mind that brought confusion and fear to me. I liked girls but felt very uncomfortable dating or allowing anyone to touch me or to interact on that level. What I mean was that most of my friends had girlfriends. I wanted one, but for some reason I felt like there was something wrong with me. This feeling increased as I got older. Even though I did start to date and then had several relationships, I felt insecure and troubled.

When I entered my 20s, I was kind of floating around, not knowing what I wanted to do. My father was a New York City Police officer and encouraged me to take the test, so I did. I became a cop and worked in Staten Island where I grew up. Everything seemed good for a while. But I noticed that when I had to deal with traumatic situations on the job, it would trigger something in me. I would get really angry and, at times, even violent. Because of my behavior, they transferred me to the lower side of Manhattan to alphabet city, the ninth precinct. This precinct was filled with violence, drugs, and a lot of other crimes. What I witnessed as a cop on the street started getting to me. Besides that, I also had a lot of personal issues. I began to lift weights, got very aggressive, and even became hostile with perps and other officers. One day, I was addressed by one of my peers. He said, "Columbia, you look like you're gonna explode!" He was right. I felt like a soda bottle ready to blow!

I worked security part time in Harlem, New York to save money to buy a home. I was married and had one child. After a bad day at work and another cop calling me out, I was ready to have a showdown with God. As I went up to the roof to lock up late at night, I began talking to God. This progressed into me yelling at God, cursing at God, and eventually taking out my gun. I pointed it up in the air, screaming and saying, "God, if You're real and You're there, what's stopping me right now from blowing my brains out? I wanna know if You're real! I wanna know if You're there, and I wanna know now!" Instead of getting hit by a lightning bolt and being taken out of my misery, the exact opposite happened. I felt a presence, a light, and a love that was so powerful and so great. It's hard to describe it with words. I knew in an instant that God was real. I knew that He loved me, and I knew that He had a plan for my life!

Instead of blowing my brains out on that roof, God met me with His love, honesty, presence, and power. This really happened! The evidence is that 30 years later, my life has drastically changed since that rooftop encounter. I left out a lot of details here, but I wrote a book about it titled "Transformed." It's actually on Amazon if you'd like to read more about my story.

What really happened on that roof is that God met me at my weakest point. He showed me His love and power and shared with me why I was so messed up when I was growing up. I asked Him what was wrong with me on that roof, and He told me I was molested as a child. This is something that was suppressed in my subconscious and would pop out once in a while, but I would bury it again. After that rooftop experience, I felt a demonic presence leave my body and my life. I felt a lightness in my mind and in my heart. I wanted to learn more about this God. I grew up Catholic and always believed in Jesus, but after this encounter, I wanted to know more. One of the cops that I work with was the son of a pastor, and he was involved in church singing. I didn't like this guy. I thought he was a religious nut. But God has a sense of humor! We became friends, I shared my story with him, and he helped me on my journey to where I am today. The evidence that God is real is that I didn't blow my brains out on that roof. God changed my heart, my vision, and my life! If He did it for me, He can do it for you. That's the message I received on that roof, and that's the message I've been living

by for the past 32 years!

Since then, I left the police department a different man. The first five years of my policing, I was a mean, angry, prejudiced cop. The next five years, I was a man with hope and had a desire to share what happened to me with others. Even as I was arresting them and fingerprinting them, I would tell them their life wasn't over. I would share that God could save them as He did for me. I grew up with religion. This was not religion. This was a personal relationship with God. No one can dispute it. I don't care who you are! I've been living my life for Him ever since. Can you believe it? I became a pastor! It's almost comical. I'm also a chaplain for four different law-enforcement organizations within my community. The evidence is real, and I'm a part of it. I hope you benefit from my story.

Thank you for listening, and may God bless you and save you like He did me. Jesus Christ died for our sins and gave us forgiveness so we can forgive and share that good news with others. That is the Gospel!

John 3:16,17 – For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send his son into the world to condemn it, but to save it!

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CHAPTER 2

Trauma

At 22 years old, I was living my childhood dream as a police officer.

At 25, I felt burned out. Can I survive the stress of a police career?

I walked in on my roommate's lifeless body, smelling the smoke of his gun.

We were likely going to be just another statistic in divorce rates.

I struggled to overcome my addiction to porn...

I am a Chicago native, and my law enforcement career began in 1989 with the Streamwood Police Department as a police cadet. I was sworn in as a police officer in 1991 and retired as a police Sergeant in 2018.

It was great to be 22 years old, living out a childhood dream as a police officer. I was in top physical shape, wearing a shiny police badge, and feeling invincible. I believed in God and the historical Jesus, but I was spiritually lost and searching for more. At 25, just three years later, I felt burned out.

I asked myself, "Can I survive a twenty-plus-year police career while managing the stress?" Chasing women and drinking beer after my shift wasn't enough for me. Early in my career, my roommate was also a police officer. After a night of bar hopping, we came home. Soon after, he chose to take his own life. Unbeknownst to me, he was upset over a recent breakup with his girlfriend. He decided on a permanent solution to a temporary problem. Walking in on his lifeless body and smelling gun smoke was both a tragedy and a shock that struck me to my core. This trauma, combined with feeling spiritually empty, made me feel like I was in a spiritual coma.

I got married, but it was a rocky start. We were likely to be just another statistic in divorce rates. A year into our marriage, I struggled to overcome my addiction to porn because I was hiding my shame from my wife.

At the department, I met a senior juvenile police detective, Darwin Adams. He was an imposing man in stature with a vise-like handshake from years of milking cows, but he had a gentle heart. Detective Adams seemed very old to me at the time. I had heard that when he began his police career, he earned only fifty cents an hour! However, he was exactly who I needed, a wiser and older mentor.

Detective Adams caught my attention with his quiet strength and peaceful heart. I admired what he had, so I accepted his invitation to attend a men's breakfast at Moody Church. Even though I grew up in Chicago, I had never heard of Moody. I thought he meant "Moonie Church," but being at the end of my spiritual rope, I was willing to try anything. We attended a Moody Church men's breakfast. It was a life-changing moment to hear fifteen hundred men singing praises to God. Although initially unfamiliar, it touched my heart. I don't remember the message, but my spiritual appetite for God was craving more.

Soon after, I accepted an invitation from Detective Adams and Officer Tom Cooper to join other police officers and firefighters at a Promise Keepers conference in Texas. Until the opening session, I didn't understand what Promise Keepers was all about, but I learned then. Dallas Cowboys Coach Tom Landry spoke a powerful Gospel message. He explained how Jesus Christ died for my sins, rose from the dead, and wants a relationship with me.

For the very first time, I realized and understood that I was a sinner in need of a Savior. I saw that none of my "good deeds" could save me. I once thought I could earn my way to heaven. I now understand that Jesus Christ's forgiveness, grace, and mercy are gifts to me because of His unfailing love. I confessed that I was a sinner and made a deliberate choice to follow Jesus Christ, asking Him to be my Lord and Savior. I asked Jesus to forgive my sins and committed my life to Him. I became a born-again follower of Jesus Christ in front of seventy thousand men! I remember arriving home from the conference, and my wife noticed the immediate change in my life.

Because I have been born again, Jesus Christ healed my trauma, freed me from my porn addiction, and restored my marriage. God has called me to serve as an ordained minister with a heart for sharing the Gospel

with first responders. I joined the Fellowship of Christian Peace Officers ministry. I serve as president of Chapter 75, where I advocate for the emotional well-being of first responders, provide chaplain support, and offer critical incident stress management training.

My commitment to serving my family in the name of Jesus Christ is a cornerstone of my life. I have happily been married to my wife, a woman of noble character, for the past 31 years. We are blessed parents, having raised our three daughters. They are all now married to born-again followers of Christ, and we are now grandparents.

Our marriage is a dedication to serving others, as shown in our role as marriage mentors. We support fellow first responders, helping them navigate their lives Biblically to avoid stress-related pitfalls and handle the demands and challenges of a first responder's career.

I owe my blessed marriage to the ultimate marriage counselor, Jesus Christ! He is the mortar that keeps my family protected.

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The Truth

The people you have just read about had to come to a place of knowing, understanding, and accepting the truth before their lives could be changed.

As you read through these “Truths” in the pages ahead, take time to think about your life. These truths, when received, invite you into a loving relationship with God that will bring you peace, joy, and personal transformation to discover and fulfill your life’s purpose and destiny.

Throughout the rest of this book, in between the many more “Real Life Stories,” we will share some of these truths with you.

CHAPTER 3

Trial by Fire

I decided a professional football career wasn't the life I wanted.

I joined the Phoenix Fire Department at age 23 and promoted at 26.

At a structure fire, I fell through the roof.

When I came to, all I saw was orange. Everything was engulfed. It literally looked like hell....

I was born in the '70s to a blue-collar family. My mom had immigrated from Mexico and spoke very little English. My dad was African American from New Jersey and spoke very little Spanish. I don't know how, but they made it work. When I was 7, my family moved to a small town east of Los Angeles. I was introduced to football, and I fell in love with it. By the time I graduated from high school, we had won the state championship. I felt like I was on top of the world. I was partying, drinking, getting into fights, chasing girls, and hanging out with like-minded friends. That was my life, week after week.

I was accepted into UCLA, where I continued my football dreams. My mom raised me Catholic until I gave my life to Christ at 18 years old. My dad ended up getting saved before I went to college. After he was born again, he was on fire for Jesus. He was persistent in witnessing to me about giving my life to Christ. I'd be hungover, and he'd be trying to get me to pray the sinner's prayer. I would just laugh it off, but he never stopped. For the next 10 to 12 years, he shared his faith with everyone, everywhere he went. I was exposed to the truth. I believed, but I wasn't ready to commit.

It was near the start of football camp that I was invited to a group called Christians in Action. They held Bible studies after practice. After a couple of weeks, the leader of the group gave an altar call and asked if anyone wanted to give their life to Jesus. I heard a still small voice that said, "You need to do this." That was August 15, 1995. That's when I accepted Christ into my life.

However, I was living half in and half out. The world still had its influence on me. Being new in my walk with Christ, I had ups and downs. Sometimes I felt close to the Lord, eager to study and learn. Most often though, I struggled with the lusts of the flesh. The old life kept coming back. Friends from high school would come visit and want to go out and party. I started to notice something: I didn't enjoy that life anymore. The Lord was definitely working in me.

I had a successful four years playing college football. I was in great shape, but I wasn't sure if I wanted to pursue a professional career. During Christmas break, I heard a sermon about career paths. I decided football wasn't the life I wanted. I wanted to be a firefighter. In 2000, at age 23, I joined the Phoenix Fire Department. Two years later, I moved to the Los Angeles Fire Department. Two years after that, I got married. My career was rewarding, and it looked like a wonderful future lay ahead for both my family and my job.

In the summer of 2007, I got the call: I was being promoted to Fire Station 26 as an apparatus operator. I was so excited. This was a huge deal to me. Station 26 was full of people who loved the job and were eager to do it. On the morning of July 24, 2007, we did some drill time at a house and had a few calls during the day. After dinner, around 8 p.m., we got a call for a structure fire. It was a one-story commercial building used as an auto shop. An attached rear building was fully engulfed. You could see the amber glow of the flames. There was no access from the front, only roll-up doors. I set up my outriggers for the aerial ladder and climbed to the roof with my chainsaw. My job was to open the roof to vent the smoke so the ground crew could fight the fire below. My captain had already beat me to the roof.

When you're on scene, your mind is processing an enormous amount of information. Looking back, I think seeing him on the roof gave me a false sense of security, like, "If he's up there, it must still be structurally sound." I got off the ladder and walked the perimeter toward the left side of the building. I reached a division wall and stepped over it. I took two steps forward, and then I fell through the roof. I fell directly into the rear of the building, which was fully engulfed. My chainsaw was still running. I didn't have my breathing apparatus on my face. I fell 12 feet and did a faceplant into a sea of fire. By God's grace, I landed on a

portion of fencing inside the building that was used as a holding pen for solvents and chemicals. That broke my fall and flipped me onto the concrete. If I'd taken a step or two to the left, I would have been impaled by fence posts, spiked at the top. That would've pinned me closer to ceiling height, where temperatures reach 2,000 degrees. If I'd fallen one or two steps to the right, I would've faceplanted onto the concrete and been in an even worse position. Somehow, after falling with 80 pounds of gear on, I didn't break a single bone.

My captain saw me fall through the roof. All he saw was a ball of flame erupting through the hole. When I came to, all I saw was orange. Everything was engulfed. It literally looked like hell. My first thought? "How embarrassing. First day at the new station, and my name will be attached to this failed operation."

Right then, the Lord exposed the pride in my heart. The Bible says, "Pride comes before the fall." That moment of revelation would later change my life forever.

My second thought was, "I'm not getting out." I was in the building alone. "Lord, I'm ready to be with You." I had peace in that moment, whether I was going home to Christ or home to my family... I was okay.

Then the pain began. I could feel my flesh burning, layer after layer, then the muscles and tendons. I was in the fire for 7 minutes, 10 seconds. Imagine grabbing a hot pan from your oven and you can't let go for over seven minutes. I was praying for the Lord to speed up the process. Later, I found out that another station enroute to the fire had my old captain on the truck. He heard about my situation on the radio. There was a rookie firefighter on board who had previously been a pastor. Both the driver and my old captain were not believers, but my captain immediately looked at the rookie and ordered him to start praying out loud. That kind of thing doesn't happen on fire trucks, but he did it. I'm so thankful for their prayers. Another firefighter enroute heard what happened. He pulled out his phone and sent a prayer request to multiple prayer chains. Again, this is totally unheard of, but he did it. I'm thankful for that too.

Back on the roof, my captain saw a charged hose line below. He ordered someone to throw it up. He then placed the hose into the hole I fell through and opened it up. This went against everything we're trained to

do. Pouring water on that much heat creates steam so hot it could've cooked me alive, but he felt like God was telling him to do it. He later confessed at my bedside that he didn't expect me to survive. He thought at best, he'd recover my body.

When he sprayed that water into the hole, the burning stopped. Right as I was crying out to the Lord, "Stop the burn or take me home," the water came. They pulled me out after 7 minutes and 10 seconds. It was no longer just a fire; it became a rescue. What those men did, how God orchestrated every piece of it, was truly a miracle. No one, including myself, expected me to survive. And today, I don't even have any respiratory problems. God is good.

I was placed in a medically induced coma for over a week. Over 33% of my body had third-degree burns. The swelling was enormous. While on the breathing machine, I developed pneumonia. Doctors were concerned I might not survive or that I'd never breathe on my own again. It was a tense time for my wife. I spent five weeks in the ICU. When I finally got out, I was told I'd never work again. That was hard. I battled depression and sleepless nights. I relived the ordeal constantly. The mental healing took longer than the physical. It was a challenging time for my faith, but with help, I dug deeper. Before the accident, I was a believer. After it all, He became real, tangible, and ever-present.

1 Peter 1:7: "So that the tested genuineness of your faith – more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

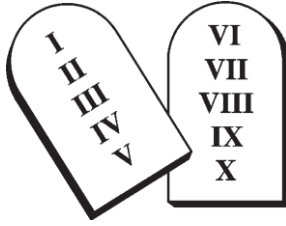
All that I went through is more precious than gold because it brought me closer to Him. As we get closer to Him, the things of this earth lose their grip. This trial has been precious to me because I know my Savior more. I know too much to be scared. Jesus has restored my life. I am back to work. I am serving my community and my fellow firefighters through Firefighters for Christ. It truly is a modern-day miracle what Christ has done for me.

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God's Law



THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

- 1 You shall have no other gods before me
- 2 You shall not make yourself any graven image
- 3 You shall not take the Name of the Lord your God in vain
- 4 Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy
- 5 Honor your father and mother
- 6 You shall not kill
- 7 You shall not commit adultery
- 8 You shall not steal
- 9 You shall not lie
- 10 You shall not covet

Each of the people you have read about had to face God's Law.

Have You Obeyed God's Law?

Are You Sure?

You can go to the next page and read several more "Real Life Stories" or you can skip ahead to our next truth on page 19.

CHAPTER 4

My Calling

I went on my first fire call, and I was hooked!

I lost 40 close friends in the Sept 11, 2011 World Trade Center tragedy.

A paralyzing moment at Ground Zero. I was three stories up on a ladder when a wave of terror overwhelmed me while climbing. I froze.

After 9/11, my family felt like the grief and agony would never end.

I was raised Roman Catholic, so I grew up knowing about religion but knew nothing about having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. I remember when my dad got sick. I was fervently praying the rosary, but it was out of fear and was completely ritualistic. During my teenage years, I started getting into trouble. That included drugs, alcohol, and running with the wrong crowd. My dad became concerned, and he's the one who encouraged me to look into becoming a firefighter.

I started my firefighting career in New Jersey. It was 1980 when I went on my first fire call, and I was hooked! I knew this was what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. I've never regretted it or second-guessed it. This was my calling. The first person the Lord placed in my life with any Christian influence was a man named Willy. I met him in 1986 while working on a U.S. Army base. He asked me, "Jerry, how are you getting to heaven?"

I replied, "Because my mom says I'm a good person." Willy opened the Bible and clearly showed me I was a sinner and needed Jesus Christ to save me. That next night, while I was alone, I prayed. I repented of my sins and accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. I asked the Lord to be merciful to me. Shortly after that, Willy was transferred. I never saw him again, and I never received or pursued any real discipleship. I didn't know how to grow in my faith or walk with Christ. I knew nothing about being a disciple. I used to carry around a little Gideon's Bible in my fire coat, simply because it made me feel closer to God.

In 1990, I joined the New York Fire Department and was assigned to the Bronx. I would spend the next 32 years serving with the FDNY and eventually retire as a captain. It was at the beginning of my FDNY career that I met Carlos. He was a bold, born-again believer who shared the gospel with me and invited me to his church. He helped me get my first Bible. At the time, I was still attending a Catholic church with my wife, but we decided to visit Carlos's church. I'm so grateful we did because we clearly heard the gospel. After the service, we both knew we were supposed to be there. The Holy Spirit convicted us that we needed to be baptized. In 1994, after my wife and I had been attending the church for a while, we were both baptized.

In 1997, tragedy struck my family. Two weeks after my daughter was born, she passed away. She had acquired a hospital-born infection. It was a wake-up call for my faith. It awakened in me a deeper need for Christ, and I began to get serious about my walk with the Lord. My wife and I fully committed to raising our family God's way. I even smashed all my secular rock and roll albums to pieces. Thirty years later, I can still remember some of the lyrics from the music I used to listen to. I wanted God's Word in my heart, and I wanted my mind to be renewed. It was during that time, in 1997, that I began looking for ministries I could relate to and grow with. I found the Firefighters for Christ organization. After meeting the founder, John White, he encouraged me to pray about starting a chapter in the FDNY. After praying and talking with other Christian firefighters, we launched the FFC NYC chapter in the fall of 1998. I believe it was God's providence that between 1999 and 2001, we were able to place a Bible in every firehouse in New York City. 221 Bibles were distributed.

September 11, 2001 would forever change my life, my family, my city, our country, and our world. Everyone remembers where they were and what they were doing that day. I was off duty, at home, working in my dining room when the attack on the World Trade Center occurred. Another Firefighters for Christ member called me and told me to turn on the TV. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. I looked at my wife and said, "I have to go." Traffic was terrible, and it took me a long time to get to the firehouse. By the time I arrived, my rig was about to pull out. I put one foot on the floorboard and a hand on the truck when my captain yelled at me, saying it was full and I'd have to wait for the next round.

It ended up being the largest recorded rescue mission in U.S. history. Over 50,000 people were evacuated before the towers collapsed. I don't know why, but the Lord had other plans for my life. Many firehouses lost their entire crews in the tower implosions. When I finally made it to the scene, it looked like a snowstorm had rolled through, nothing but dust everywhere. In the months that followed, I never found a desk, monitor, or toilet. Everything was incinerated. Nothing recognizable remained. For the first three months, we battled fires 24/7 with nonstop water and foam. We had to bring in foam from West Virginia, the kind used to put out coal fires. During the first week after the attack, we were sifting through the ash using five-gallon buckets, looking for any trace of remains. We worked long shifts for more than half a year, searching through the debris. You can imagine the mental toll that took. In the first week, we still hoped to find survivors. After that, we just wanted something, anything, that could bring closure to families. I kept asking myself, "Did they know Jesus? Did I ever share the gospel with them?" Most people don't know that more than half of the 343 fallen first responders were never found, not even a fragment. I lost 40 close friends in that tragedy. We worked 24-hour shifts, 24 on and 24 off. I was exhausted. I'd lie in bed asking my wife, "Why? What is God doing?" I felt shell-shocked.

I began searching the Psalms for comfort and answers. I was reading Psalm 46: "Be still and know that I am God." I would fall asleep with those words in my heart, even though I didn't feel like I was getting answers. The next day, the Holy Spirit used that exact verse to deliver me from a paralyzing moment at Ground Zero. I was three stories up on a ladder during a recovery mission when a wave of terror overwhelmed me while climbing. I froze. As that Scripture came flooding back to me, it reminded me that the Lord was with me. He had me in His hands. I was able to finish the mission. Even in the hardest moments, when we don't understand, God is faithful. That night, we were able to recover two firefighter bodies and return them to their families for a proper funeral. After 9/11, my family felt like the grief and agony would never end, but God used the tragedy to bring many people to Christ. Firefighters for Christ hosted a tea party for the wives and widows of those involved. One hundred women came. Eighty of them gave their lives to Jesus that day. Churches all across America were filling up again. People were searching for answers. Not long after, Firefighters

for Christ committed to sharing the gospel with every firefighter in the FDNY. It took five years, but by 2007, every firefighter in New York had heard the gospel at least once. Since then, Firefighters for Christ has made it a priority to continue that mission. For the past 23 years, every new recruit in the FDNY Probationary Fire School hears the gospel at least once.

343 firefighters were lost in the 9/11 attacks. Not one of them woke up that morning thinking, “Today will be my last.” They ran into burning towers to save others, not knowing how much time they had. When one of the towers began to collapse, it took less than six seconds. So I ask you: Do you know where you will be seconds from now? You are not guaranteed tomorrow. Being a firefighter or a “good person” doesn’t get you into heaven. What is the value of your soul? God loved you so much that He gave His only Son, so that you would not perish but have eternal life. He made it simple for both you and me: Romans 10:9–10 “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” It is through repentance and faith in Christ, not your own good works, that you are saved.

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Sin

On page 14, we asked if you had obeyed God's Law. *Have You?* Most people will say, "Yes, I have. I am a good person." Let's focus now and take a close look at some of God's Laws:

Commandment No. 9 says: *You shall not lie.*

Have you ever lied? Told a fib? Maybe just a little white lie? Twisted a story to meet your need? Lied when you were a child? Lied at work? Lied on your tax return? Lied for your spouse or kids? If I lied, what would that make me? A Liar.

Now let's look at Commandment No. 8: *You shall not steal.*

Have you ever stolen? Taken something from work? Taken a piece of candy? Cheated on your taxes? Worked for cash and did not claim it as income? In your younger years, did you take anything that did not belong to you? What is a person called that has admitted to the above? A Thief.

Now let's look at Commandment No. 7: *You shall not commit adultery.*

Have you committed adultery? Jesus said, "Anyone who even looks at a woman with lust in his eye has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Have you ever looked at another person with lustful thoughts? What would a person be called that has done the above? An Adulterer.

At this point we have talked about three of God's Laws. How many have you broken?

Take a moment to go back to page 14. See if you have broken any more of God's Laws.

From here, you can go to the next page and read more "Real Life Stories," or you can skip to page 23 for the next truth.

CHAPTER 5

Something Extraordinary Happened

The Chicago Fire Department was testing for firefighters.

I joined a class of 160 recruits.

An instructor told us, “Out of a class this size, five of you will be killed on the job.”

About a year into the job, one of the guys I started with made the 6 o’clock news. He was the first from our class to be killed.

As we pulled up to an extra-alarm fire in a multi-unit apartment building, we saw a woman on the fourth floor about to throw a baby out the window.

“Don’t throw the baby! I’ll get you down!” I shouted...

Growing up in the '40s, I was the firstborn of two brothers and three sisters. Dad was strict. As I recall, there wasn't much of a relationship between my parents and us kids. Family life was okay. We ate, and I remember a lot of pea casseroles. They were filling, and that was the idea. Dad had issues with “control.” Sundays were reserved for church, and we all went together.

After high school, I joined the Marines. It sounded exciting, and it was. However, my church attendance began to decline. Actually, it pretty much stopped altogether. After four years in the Marines, including time in Vietnam, I received an honorable discharge in 1967. Along the way, I met my first and only wife, Marge. We married in 1971. I knew what it was like living with eight people in a family, having the basics in life but not much else. That didn't excite me. One day, Dad mentioned that the Chicago Fire Department was testing for firefighters. “Would you be interested?” he asked. Opportunities like this didn't come around often, so maybe it would be a good move for me. Not long after, I received a letter saying that training would begin on such-and-such a date. I joined a class of 160 recruits.

On our first day, one of the instructors told us, “Out of a class this size, five of you will be killed on the job.” Little did I know that within the next five years, I would come dangerously close to becoming number three. I should’ve been killed in Vietnam. Why was I still alive? Maybe God was watching over me. I hoped He hadn’t left me yet. Since returning home, I’d been back in church every Sunday. I found it long and boring, but I kept going.

After graduating from the Fire Academy, we were assigned to various fire companies throughout Chicago. My first fire was a 3-story frame house, with flames pouring out of a basement window and licking up the sides. I was worried that the fire would ignite the dry wood siding of the house. The captain was calm, though. He kicked in the door and said, “Jim, hit it with a hard line.” The fire was out in less than 60 seconds. At that time, we didn’t have air tanks. I had to go through the entire basement to reach the fire, and I inhaled a lot of smoke. It was a mattress fire, snotty and thick. About a year into the job, one of the guys I started with made the 6 o’clock news. He was the first from our class to be killed. Number two came a few years later.

We responded to a high-rise fire. My job was to clear the floor beneath the fire floor. The smoke was growing more toxic and dense, and there were still no air tanks. I was struggling to breathe, so I started crawling on the floor, putting my nose between the wall and the floor for any bit of air. I couldn’t see more than two inches in front of me, and I couldn’t call for help. I was seconds from taking my last breath when suddenly a door opened. Fresh air! Thank God. I wondered if God was trying to tell me something.

Next, we responded to an extra-alarm fire in a multi-unit apartment building. As we pulled up, we saw a woman on the fourth floor about to throw a baby out the window. My partner and I grabbed the extension ladder. “Don’t throw the baby! I’ll get you down!” I shouted. My partner was needed inside, and as thick black smoke poured out of the apartment, I discovered another mom and more children in the same apartment. I knew they were all in danger, but I managed to get everyone safely out and down the ladder. After a few intense moments, they were all okay. Just another day at the office. However, what I didn’t realize at the time was that I needed saving too.

I started reading about flipping houses, which seemed like a good way to make money. By this time, Marge and I had two daughters, and I wanted them to have a better life than I had. I bought two houses, working on them during my days off. One day, I found an old radio. I couldn't stand the music on most stations, but one station came in clearly. It was a guy talking about the Bible. I thought it would be over soon and that better programming would follow. Then another guy came on, and he talked about the Bible too! What was going on? They said that Jesus is the only way to heaven. Doing good works wouldn't get you there. No church could save you. Jesus said you must be born again, and you need a personal relationship with Him. For some reason, I kept listening. At first, it was just entertainment, but soon, I began to take them seriously. If this is true, then had I been killed in Vietnam or in that fire, would I be in hell now? I was confused. Most of all, I realized how serious this all was. Lying in bed, overwhelmed with information, I couldn't figure out what was true.

Then, something extraordinary happened. Suddenly, I saw a dark form float out of my body. As I watched, the form drifted upward. At the same time, a whitish form slowly emerged through the ceiling. As it came closer, it began to melt into my body. Immediately, every nerve, fiber, and muscle in my body was overwhelmed with the love of Jesus. I can't explain how I knew it was Jesus, but I just knew. It was like 100,000 volts of sweet, electric energy surging through me, enveloping me completely in His supernatural, magnificent love. It was a rapture of intense joy, pure ecstasy, and that's an understatement! Words can't fully describe it. It was life-changing and incredibly intense, and it lasted for five years. That experience cleared up my confusion. It's Jesus, and Him only, nothing and no one else.

I am truly honored for the countless opportunities to share with others the message of God's love. I have the privilege of proclaiming that Jesus is the Son of God, and that through confession and repentance, He offers forgiveness and the chance to be born again, to spend eternity with Him.

Jim

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Penalty for Sin

One day, every man, woman, and child that ever lived will have to pay the price for their sins.

The Bible says:

“For the wages of sin is death.” -Romans 6:23

Death, meaning eternally (forever) separated from God. Every person will spend eternity somewhere. Heaven or Hell. (There is no in between.) You are either with God or the Devil.

At this point, you may be thinking this is hopeless. “I cannot obey God’s Law.” The truth is you cannot do it on your own. You need help. God does not want you to face the Fires of Hell and the curse of the Law, and He has provided for you one, and only one chance of escape.

At this point you can go to the next page to read more “Real Life Stories” or turn to page 27 for the next truth.

CHAPTER 6

The Last Time We Spoke

My dad served as a firefighter.

I wanted to be a fireman.

I thought the trucks, lights, and sirens were the coolest thing ever.

Dad's accident was my first interaction with the Fire Department.

Those first responders were selfless and committed...

I remember when I was very young, my Grandma Betty (my dad's mother) would take me to Wednesday night services at Orchardville Church. Back then, it was small. I believe she may have been one of its founding members about a decade earlier. Mom and Dad didn't attend church at that time, but Grandma faithfully took me. I loved being there and playing with the other children. I think my first Sunday in an actual church building was in first grade when Mom and Dad took me to their workplace pastor's church. I told them it was "okay," but that I'd rather go to Grandma Betty's church. The following Sunday we went to Orchardville. Thankfully, 25 years later, it remains my church, and I pray the Lord never calls me to leave.

In children's church, Randy was my pastor. He had a passionate heart for kids, wanting us to grow in and know the Lord. At age eight, I repented of my sins, got saved, and was baptized in a pond behind a church member's home. I felt the Lord calling me, and I responded. As I entered my teenage years, I began attending the main service, which we called "big church." Pastor Mark had been there before our family joined. Many of his messages still guide me today. He was taken from us in 2015 by renal cell carcinoma, but I believe God still worked through that in mysterious ways. During that time, the church was growing. New families arrived, people were getting saved, and lives were being changed. Mom and Dad had become very involved in serving. We barely missed a service, and they volunteered wherever needed. Home life was wonderful. Mom and Dad were loving. They met all my needs and even most of my wants. I don't remember ever seeing

or hearing them fight. Growing up with loving, God-fearing parents set me on the right path. I don't know what I would have done without them.

Then came July 24, 2006. It was a hot Monday evening that changed everything. We'd just returned from a vacation to Kentucky Lake. Mom and Dad went back to work that day. That evening, Dad was mowing with his old Ford tractor, edging the fields as he loved to do. He had a slow leak in the front tire and told me to bring an air tank in about an hour to top it off. When I filled it, he leaned down from the tractor and said, "Thanks, son. I love you." I told him I loved him too, and that was the last time we ever spoke.

Later, I saw light gray smoke in a low spot near the woods and creek at the field's edge. As dusk settled and I no longer saw or heard Dad, I returned on my three-wheeler down the mowed path seeking him. At the path's end, I found the bushhog with the cab-less tractor flipped upside down in the creek with just the back tires visible. I screamed his name, knowing he was trapped underneath. I returned home to tell Mom. Since Wayne County didn't yet have 911 or reliable cell service, she called the fire department, and we drove back in the truck. The firefighters arrived quickly. There were many familiar faces, neighbors, and friends putting us in a back seat of a pickup for support. They worked through much of the night to extricate him. Later, they explained that the creek bank had collapsed under the tractor, flipping it while Dad drove over. They said he died instantly, and I chose to believe that.

In the following weeks and months, life was excruciating. Losing my dad when I needed a father figure the most shattered me. I struggled with fear and anxiety. What if Mom was late coming home? What if it was never good news? For years, fear haunted me. But through prayer, time, an extraordinary church family, my mother and older siblings, and that supportive community, God brought healing. I'm thankful those pieces held me together.

High school brought the typical teenage distractions with girlfriends and the highs and lows of youth. Eventually I met Kaylee, my wife of now seven years and mother of our three-year-old son, Royce. We both worked in radiography. She was still in school when we met. God brought us together. Before dating, I felt unlovable and alone. Then, He

gave me her. She was my complement in every way and the answer to my prayers.

My journey as a first responder dates back to my youth. My dad had served as a firefighter for the Xenia-Orchardville Fire Protection District when younger, and I admired the firemen I knew. I wanted to be a fireman when I grew up. I thought the trucks, lights, and sirens were the coolest thing ever. Like many, I still have that love for them today. The fateful night of Dad's accident was my first interaction with the Fire Department. When those men came swiftly, ready to help and extract my Dad, it etched in me how selfless and committed they were. One of them even tore off his truck's bumper, navigating back to us in the field and would do it again without hesitation. Those first responders crossed into my life in the darkest moment, giving me and my family support and comfort.

When I turned 16 in the fall of 2008, I joined Orchardville Volunteer Fire Protection District as a junior firefighter. I took a First Responder class as soon as one was offered. At 18, I became a full member. After graduating X-ray school in 2014, I took an EMT class. Now, nearly 17 years later, I've served as Captain and was recently promoted to Second Assistant Chief. We cover about 50 square miles of rural area, sparsely populated, but we always give our best with the resources we have.

To every first responder who's been on difficult calls (calls you wish you could undo or handled differently), I want to offer encouragement. In those moments, it's vital to stop and seek God's guidance and wisdom. Pray for strength, peace, and the ability to serve those in crisis well. Pray that you bring hope, comfort, and love to those in their darkest hour. Pray that God opens doors to share about Jesus and His work in our lives. Pray that we embody the Good Samaritan, serving neighbors when they need it most. I hope my story honors my dad's memory, celebrates the unwavering love and faith of my church and family, encourages all first responders, and honors my Savior Jesus!

Nate

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God's Love

“For God loved the world so much, that he gave his only Son, so that anyone who believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” John 3:16-17

God loved His creation (you) so much that He sent His Son to earth to pay the full price for all sin.

Jesus did not come to the earth to do away with God's law. He came to fulfill it.

Jesus came as a man in the flesh and did not sin. Not one time. He obeyed the commandments, God's Law. Fully. He did for you what you could never do.

Jesus was beaten, tortured, and hung on a cross. While on that cross, the sins of the world (your sins) were placed on His shoulders.

Jesus died for and with your sins, but death could not hold Him; the grave could not contain Him. He arose from that grave paying the full price for every person's sin. (That includes you.)

It is only through God's Love, God's Mercy, and God's Grace that we can escape the curse of the law.

From here, you can go to the next page for more “Real Life Stories,” or skip to page 31 for more truth.

CHAPTER 7

Blow Up My Dam

My father was a firefighter, and I wanted to be like my dad.

After high school, I started the Aims Fire Science degree program.

I was hired as an EMT Firefighter.

I went on to become a paramedic, a Lieutenant, and a Captain.

I learned that this is a cruel world.

I was angry at life, angry at the church, and angry at my marriage...

My journey to find who the real Jesus is started at a backyard meeting in Loveland, Colorado. I was 7 when I said “the prayer,” but it wouldn’t be until I was almost 50 before I would truly understand who He is.

My father was a firefighter for the city of Loveland, Colorado. This is where I fell in love with emergency services. I wanted to be like my dad. When I graduated High School, I started the Aims Fire Science degree program and became an intern with Berthoud Fire Protection District. It was at this same time the church I attended split. It was ugly, and I left the faith. The people in uniforms and badges were treating me and each other better than those in the church. Besides, these emergency service people were amazing. Enter in John Feyen. He was the paramedic, and I was his EMT on the Ambulance stationed at the Berthoud Fire Station. My love for medicine didn’t start off because I wanted to help all these people. My love for medicine was because when John spoke, every firefighter listened. I wanted to be that guy.

So began my journey of 28 years at Thompson Valley EMS in Loveland, Colorado. Getting hired as an EMT Firefighter in March of 1995, I went on to become a paramedic, a Lieutenant, and then a Captain. With those years, I would learn that this is a cruel world. People would find new ways to destroy themselves. We, the paramedics, were on the front row for the show. I struggled with church at the beginning of my career, and I struggled deeply with what I was seeing. How can a God so amazing be allowing all this destruction?

The first year I was a paramedic I ran calls never repeated by anyone. One summer, we had 13 fatalities on the Interstate running through our district. One was a car full of three teenage girls, all killed. I would go to church, but I was not able to put together this amazing God with this amazing career and the unholy ungodly things I was seeing.

Then some men entered my life that would change my course forever. Ron Gibson, who has gone on to be with Jesus, Steve Anderson, Brad Tuttle, Mark Bower, and Sunny Weimer are amazing men who stood up for a God I was struggling with. One night at a men's meeting, I was just angry. I was angry at life, angry at the church, angry at my marriage. I was drinking and partying to deal with the job and trying to hold it together in "church world," but it was not working. I was standing in the back of the room at this men's meeting. Steve Anderson had just given a great sermon on how the Holy Spirit needs to flow in our lives, and we build dams, like beavers, because we want to build our own environment. So, we dam up God and create our own reality.

Sunny Weimer and Ron Gibson walked up to me. Ron was a biker-looking dude. Sunny is a farmer, with one arm and a hook for a prosthetic on the other. Ron walked up and put his arm around me. He smiled and asked me an interesting question, "If Jesus was standing here, what would you do?"

I laughed and said, "Punch him in the face!" They both smiled. I was now deep into my paramedic career, going to church but not really believing it. I was taking overtime, running calls, and feeling important. That's what we do as first responders. We help everyone else but not ourselves. Those offering help were just as crazy and wacko as us needing the help.

Ron asked me if I would ask Jesus to "Blow up my dam." I looked at him with a look of disgust and told him no, but he kept on me. After a short conversation, I finally said, "Jesus Blow up my dam." Then, I looked at them and said, "Can I leave now?" They asked me to say it a couple of more times. The last time, it was as if something reached down my throat, grabbed me by my toes, and bent me in half. I fell to the ground weeping, and Jesus blew up my dam. I was set free that day of anger. However, I wish I could say that was the end.

As my career moved forward, I would see more and more destruction of people, domestic fights, murders, infants die, a double house fire fatality, and on and on. I again struggled with faith and the job, leaving Jesus behind, and picked up the bottle. This time, I used pornography to attempt to soothe my soul's hurts. Once again, I would find myself in marriage counseling, leaving a church that was splitting and fleeing from God.

Pastor Carl Sutter preached a sermon on failure. It was titled, "The bounce that counts." In summary, the message was that we all fail, but it is what we do after we fall that counts. It hit me hard. I found a man named Lee Eddie with Face to Face Ministries and began an inner healing process that would take me straight to Jesus. This time, I understood.

I realized I was trying to deal with all this trauma, the job, a family, and shift work all by myself. I was failing at it. Though it looked like I was winning, I wasn't. When I surrendered to Jesus, when I truly said, "I need you," is when things began to change. I felt better inside. I was more rested. I treated people different and even started to pray with my patients, seeing incredible things happen when Jesus was in the center. I may still have moments that a traumatic time or call emerges in my mind, but I know now more than ever to turn those thoughts over to Jesus. He takes that pain away. I no longer have suicidal thoughts, and I no longer struggle with pornography, I am a child of the one True King, Jesus. My career ended in July of 2023. I now have a passion to tell first responders that we will struggle, and we will fall, but Jesus heals, delivers, and sets us free from all the trauma. Jesus is the answer. He saved my marriage, my life, and my family. Jesus is the answer you are looking for when you ask the question, "Can I go on any longer? I can't stop feeling this pain. I can't stop drinking." My answer is yes, you can. His name is Jesus. Surrender to Him. He is faithful to save you.

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Judgement Day

The Bible promises us a final judgement:

“And I saw a great white throne and the one who sat upon it, from whose face the earth and sky fled away, but they found no place to hide. I saw the dead, great and small, standing before God; and The Books were opened, including the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to the things written in The Books, each according to the deeds he had done. The oceans surrendered the bodies buried in them; and the earth and the underworld gave up the dead in them. Each was judged according to his deeds. And Death and Hell were thrown into the Lake of Fire. This is the Second Death—the Lake of Fire. And if anyone’s name was not found recorded in the Book of Life, he was thrown into the Lake of Fire.”

Revelation 20:11-5

At the judgement, books are opened. The Books contain every good or bad deed of every person. The book of Life contains the names of those who have put their trust in Christ to save them.

When God judges you, will you be found guilty or innocent? Will you spend eternity (forever) in Heaven or Hell?

To read more “Real Life Stories,” go to the next page. For the next truth; skip to page 39.

CHAPTER 8

My Childhood Nemesis

“Emergency” was my favorite TV program.

I was the paramedic on duty at a fire station several miles from my old neighborhood.

My childhood anxieties and fears resurfaced.

I would soon be facing the boogie man from my past.

He squeezed my hand...

It was during my early youth at nine years of age that I experienced God’s wonderful, saving grace. I trusted Christ as my savior and master and prayed that His will for my life would be professional baseball. Baseball was my passion and a huge part of my life. Throughout high school and college, it appeared that baseball was His will. God gave me continued success until my second year of college when an awkward fall produced a partial dislocation in my shoulder. I didn’t want surgery, so the doctor prescribed eight weeks of rest from baseball. I reluctantly retreated to the stands, wishing inwardly that I was still out on the field. My injury lingered well beyond the eight weeks. For the first time since I was nine, I was filled with doubts.

Jeremiah 29:11 says God knows his plans for my life, but it was obvious that God’s plan and my plan were not one in the same. Doubts filled my mind, and all I could do was place everything in His hands. “Emergency” was my favorite TV program, and I would never miss a Saturday night episode. This show seemed to captivate me as a child. I couldn’t get enough of the drama, speeding, fires, ambulances, action, quick responses, and realistic heroes in the uniform. The intrigue continued into my teenage years. Eventually, armed with a driver’s license, I was always on the lookout for the flashing lights of emergency vehicles. This always stuck with me. Within months after being done with baseball, God began to again heighten my interest in emergency work, especially fire rescue. I felt Him encouraging me to attend the local college fire Academy. I sensed Him leading me into a part-time hospital security position that provided exposure to the emergency room

and rescue personnel in action.

The excitement was contagious. “God, is this what you want me to do?” I began to ask. “Am I competent enough to do this kind of work? Am I capable of handling horrendous accidents that often result in severe injuries, bleeding, loss of limbs, and even death? Will I be able to enter burning buildings and face the possibility of seeing burned bodies? Is this really where you want me, Lord?”

As I prayed and sought God’s will, His plan for my life began to unfold. During the summer months, as I worked in security position, a close friend in the hospital laboratory approached me. “Hey Tommy. There’s an opening in the medical examiner’s office. Are you interested?”

“Why not?” I thought. “The examiner’s office was at the hospital. I could still be around the emergency room, and I could always use some extra part-time work. Besides, this could be really interesting.” Interesting doesn’t even begin to describe what laid ahead. I assumed I would be moving bodies or cleaning equipment. My brothers had worked part time at funeral homes, and that wasn’t too bad. This couldn’t be much different, could it? Boy, was I mistaken! The opening was for a denier, a person who opens up bodies and removes organs during autopsies. The first day on the job, I observed an autopsy, sitting down of course. I felt God ultimately leading me into fire rescue. Looking back, I see how God had a plan. The job at the medical examiner taught me several things. First was the ability to handle the extremely horrifying images I would eventually face as a paramedic. Second, the knowledge of human anatomy was imperative to getting through paramedic school and treating severely mangled patients. Third, and most overwhelming, was that death is real, final, and no respecter of age, position, or person. God truly blessed me through the job in the medical examiner’s office. Knowing my desire to work in fire rescue, he gave me the much-needed confidence and background to get through the fire Academy and paramedic school.

Fast forward 17 years, when I was the paramedic on duty at a fire station several miles from my old neighborhood. Our station wasn’t the closest to that neighborhood, yet it was the one dispatched to that area on that specific day. I recognized the street name instantly, and the address was

outside our response area. As the tones continued to ring in, the dispatcher called out a sick person. I was puzzled. “Why are we responding to a call so distant from our station?” Apparently, all the other stations were busy, and we were the next closest station able to respond. It was my old street that I grew up on, so I told the guys not to bother with a map. I knew exactly where to go. I knew the street, but I wasn’t sure about the house. I was hoping it wasn’t Mr. Milner’s old place. My childhood anxieties and fears resurfaced. We didn’t hate Mr. Milner. We were simply afraid of him. When we would play baseball and accidentally knock a ball into his yard, he would give an angry scowl from his spooky porch if we tried to retrieve it. My friend Robbie and I quickly adopted one strict rule. If a ball ever went into the boogie man’s yard, or if he ever appeared, we would disappear. I never wanted to meet him face-to-face. For most of the time I lived in that neighborhood, I successfully avoided Mr. Milner.

As I grew older and we moved away, I thought our paths would never cross again. “This is silly,” I said to myself. Even if it is Mr. Milner’s old place, he most likely isn’t there anymore.” But sure enough, my heart skipped when I looked out the window and realized which way the numbers ran on the street. No doubt about it, we were going to Mr. Milner’s house. My mind was racing with thoughts of what he might be like or what he might say if it was him still living in that house. Remarkably, as my anxiety reached its peak, a calming peace came over me. I realized the Holy Spirit was quietly reassuring me and allowing me to see that I was going there for a purpose. God’s mighty hand was in this, and there was no reason for doubt or fear. No other peace can compare to the beautiful peace the Holy Spirit bestows in the most doubt ridden times. It was in the midst of this warm spiritual assurance that I realized I would soon be facing the boogie man from my past. Mrs. Milner didn’t seem to recognize me as I entered her home, a place I’d lived close to for 12 years, had feared since I was five, and had never been inside of. I looked about the room, half expecting to see a big crate of old baseballs in some corner. Instead, I saw a home filled with solemn family members. Mr. Milner was dying from cancer. It had apparently spread through his whole body. He was shriveled and unrecognizable as the monster I had envisioned him to be as a child. I knew his hours left on earth were few.

At that moment, the magnitude of God's divine appointment struck me hard. The same question that plagued me when I worked at the medical examiner's office was coming to mind, "Did this person know Jesus? Did they pass from this life to eternal life with Jesus?" We had only a short trip to the hospital. Using the handheld to telemetry phone to contact the emergency room, I quickly transmitted a brief patient assessment to the emergency room physician. After hanging up, I looked out the window. The hospital was only a block away. "Lord, I need time with this man," I thought.

I was about to get rattled when I heard the voice of the Holy Spirit say, "Just trust Me." We wheeled Mr. Milner into treatment room number four. We transferred his weak, pain-ridden body to the hospital bed. As I was raising the safety rails on the bed, the nurse at the desk told me to close the treatment area curtain, and that she would be in shortly to give him his medication. I abandoned the usual paperwork and used this God given an opportunity to share some final moments with Mr. Miller.

"Go on ahead," I told my guys as I retreated behind the curtain over to Mr. Milner's side. A precious few moments were granted to us, and I wasn't about to miss this opportunity. I took a hold of Mr. Milner's hand and told him who I was. I shared salvation through Jesus Christ. I told him how he could spend eternity in God's hands. I informed him it was never too late and that acceptance could be done without a spoken word. He simply needed to believe and trust Jesus to come into his heart. "Do you believe that Jesus is God's only son and that He loves you and died for your sins?" I asked. He squeezed my hand. "Do you believe and trust Jesus to be your own personal savior?" He squeezed my hand once more. I caressed his hand with both of mine. I told him his pain would soon be over and I would see him later, in eternity. I stepped from behind the curtain, spiritually enlightened. I had no desire to do my earthly report. I just wanted to bask in God's miracle. For 45 minutes that day, God turned a sick person call into one of the most exciting calls in my career. It was a call that changed my heart about my childhood nemesis and changed my expectations of future calls FOREVER.

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CHAPTER 9

My Hard Heart

In my twenties, I became a cop, living the American dream.

I was cocky, arrogant, educated, and successful.

I was spending way too much time in bars with my brother officers.

My idols were wealth, education, and power, just to name a few...

God took me through several stages on my journey to becoming a follower of Jesus Christ. I had a great childhood with loving parents, but I would not say I had a Christian upbringing. There were never dinner or bedtime prayers, church attendance, or discussions of Jesus, sin, or salvation. I was probably ten years old before I had even heard the true meanings of Easter and Christmas. I found the accounts of Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection interesting, but I never experienced a transformation of my life and my heart.

Right around age 17, I started a short-lived journey into religious activities. These included sporadic attendance in at least three churches of three different denominations. I bought my first Bible, which I hardly ever read. I was listening to religious music. Yet, again, there was no heart or life transformation. I was more interested in having an emotional experience than being a true Jesus follower.

In my twenties, I became a cop, living the American dream. I had a beautiful new wife, a wonderful growing family, a house, a dog, a boat, and a master's degree. I had a successful career, where I was being paid a great hourly wage to drive fast and catch bad guys. I was cocky, arrogant, educated, and successful. I believed God, religion, and Jesus were for unenlightened people. I was way too smart for all that.

During this time, my wife, who was a Jesus follower, led a gentle and faithful life. She never preached to me. Rather, she was a constant godly influence. God used her quiet and loving testimony to chip away at my hard heart.

Then, around age 30, I was introduced to a book on apologetics. Essentially, I discovered that a person could believe the stories from the Bible and still be a smart person. I realized that a person could use reasoned arguments and science to support biblical truth. In my mind, if I could just study enough science, I could win any spiritual debate. If I could use the laws of thermodynamics and geology to prove Noah's worldwide flood, I could win any skeptic over to Jesus.

Once again, I missed the point of faith and salvation. I had more faith in my own knowledge than I did in the Lord Jesus Christ. I believed I could save people rather than relying on the saving work of God's Holy Spirit.

Although God was still chipping away at my hard heart during this time of my life, I do not believe I was saved yet. My desire to try to "prove the Bible" using science was simply an idol in my heart rooted out of a desire to be thought of as intelligent. I would be sitting in a bar, getting drunk, trying to debate science and Bible facts with my brother officers. This was a very strange and complicated time in my life.

I was so arrogant. I have always believed that it was difficult for a police officer to get saved. It was not difficult from God's perspective, rather, difficult from a worldly perspective. Some police officers inherently believe that the good and necessary work they do will earn them an express trip to heaven; do not pass Go, do not collect 200 dollars.

I cannot tell you how many police officer funerals I have been to where a poem is read that ends with these words: "Step forward now, policeman, you've borne your burdens well. Come walk a beat on Heaven's streets, you've done your time in hell."

I believe this is a prevailing mindset with police officers, the notion that my job, my good and necessary job, is enough to earn me an eternity in the Lord's presence. I was an arrogant and self-righteous man.

In addition to my arrogance, I was spending way too much time in bars with my brother officers. I was drinking to the point of drunkenness and being hung over the next day. I was not engaging with my wife and my young kids. You name it. It was an ugly mix of sin.

In my late 30s, God led me to a ministry that uses the Old Testament law, specifically the 10 Commandments, to tell people about Jesus. Through this ministry, I heard and understood for the very first time that I was a wretched sinner who had violated all of the 10 commandments. I finally understood that I had not put God first in my life and that I was worshiping idols. My particular idols were wealth, education, and power, just to name a few. I understood that I had lusted after women and had, thus, committed adultery in my heart. I understood that Jesus viewed my hatred for certain people as the same as murder. I understood that I had lied, stolen, and dishonored my parents, all violations of God's perfect law.

At this point in my life, I recognized my need for a perfect, sinless savior who would die the death that I deserved, to satisfy God's wrath and justice. I recognized my inability to be good enough to enter into God's perfect and holy presence. I recognized that even one sin was enough to separate me from Him for an eternity in hell. I recognized that my chosen profession of policing was not enough to allow me to receive an invitation to "come walk a beat on Heaven's streets..."

God used the words of the Bible to grant me the ability to turn from my sin and turn, in faith, to Jesus Christ as my God and my savior. I do not know exactly when I was saved. I cannot give you a date and time. I just know that, by God's grace, He revealed to me His holiness and my wretchedness. The Lord, through His gentle, gradual, and kind acts of grace, gave me a desire to worship Him in a local body of believers and removed my desire to drink to the point of drunkenness.

God has certainly not granted me the ability to live a perfect life. Rather, He has given me the grace, or the empowering, to live obediently to Christ and seek His forgiveness when, not if, but when I sin. I am grateful Jesus has allowed me to be one of His followers.

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Standing on the Fence

I was standing on a fence, and there was an incredibly large group of people assembled around it.

On one side of the group stood a man, Jesus. On the other side of the group stood another man, Satan. Separating them, running through the group, was the fence I was standing on.

Both Jesus and Satan began calling to the people in the group and, one by one, each having made up his or her mind, each went to either Jesus or Satan.

This kept going on, and eventually Jesus had gathered around him a group of people from the larger crowds, as did Satan. But I joined neither group. I stood on the fence. Then Jesus and his people left and disappeared. So too did Satan and his people.

And I was left alone, standing on the fence.

As I stood there, Satan came back. He appeared to be looking for something that he'd lost. I said, "Have you lost something?"

Satan looked straight at me and replied, "No, there you are. Come with me."

"But," I said, "I stood on the fence. I chose neither you nor Him."

"That's okay," said Satan. "I own the fence. You belong to me."

You may go to the next page for more "Real Life Stories," or skip to page 43 for more truth.

CHAPTER 10

A Loose Cannon

I became a police officer.

My temper would get out of control.

I became physically aggressive and had the reputation of being a loose cannon.

I took my position in the back of the house, covering the back door with my shotgun.

I yelled to him to freeze or I would shoot!

My dad returned home from fighting three years in the South Pacific. As a result of the war and the horrors of it, my dad came home with a very violent temper. If we stepped out of line, or sometimes for no apparent reason, he would suddenly become a monster! He would start yelling at us and abusing us kids. Kicks, body punches, and hard slaps across the face were his form of discipline. I became an angry kid and was in a fight almost every day.

After high school, I enlisted in the Army. My year in Vietnam 1971 - 1972 greatly compounded my anger issues. It was a living hell for me. When I came back to the states, I left the military. As a result of my upbringing and fighting in a war, I became very much like my dad. I had a very violent temper. In May 1973, I became a police officer. Over the first 11 years of my career, there were many times my temper would get out of control. I became physically aggressive and had the reputation of being a loose cannon. As a result, there was always somebody trying to sue the department and the town. One day, I got called into the Chief's office. He advised me, "One more incident with you, Carl, the town is going to terminate you. You are nothing but a liability risk!" After my visit to the Chief's office, I knew I was in trouble. I was married with two young daughters and was fearful of losing my job. What was I going to do?

Two months later, I was invited to a healing service. One of my closest friends, Carol, was there. Carol was blind. The healing service took

place in a big auditorium. It was packed wall to wall with people who had every affliction you could think of. When the preacher finished preaching, he started laying hands and praying over the lame. I saw people in wheelchairs suddenly standing and screaming out, "I can walk!" Others were throwing down their crutches and jumping around like a bunch of crazy people. I saw him lay hands on the deaf and the deaf crying out, "I can hear!" I saw people claiming they were healed right before my eyes. I was not buying it! I thought it was all a good act. Finally, he prayed for the blind. He had everyone who was blind close their eyes and place their hands over them. Carol was standing right next to me. He prayed that these people would see again and ended the prayer, "In Jesus name, see!" When Carol removed her hands from her eyes and opened her eyes she screamed out, "I can see!"

At that moment, everything around me went silent. It was like I was the only person standing in this big auditorium, packed with so many people. There was a presence I cannot put into words. I just knew in my heart it was Jesus standing before me. I couldn't audibly hear Him, but I heard Him in the depths of my heart say, "Carl, let me into your heart." I invited Jesus to come into my heart, and I immediately felt the anger, bitterness, and rage leave. I felt a peace, love, and joy that I had never experienced. It all came in like a flood. I was not the same Carl who woke up that morning. I couldn't wait to get home and tell everyone I knew what happened to me. However, I didn't get the response I was looking for. My wife thought I was bizarre. My friends and co-workers thought I lost it. I wasn't losing my temper or beating up on people anymore. They thought I was becoming soft and weak.

There was a guy named Jeff I arrested more times than anyone else. He hated me so much that he planned to ambush me with a crossbow and kill me. I hated him as well. After Jesus got a hold of my heart, I reached out to him. I told him Jesus loved him and died for him. It was soon after that divine encounter that Jeff became my brother in Christ and dearest friend.

February of 1985, a man named Billy had broken into a house. While he and his girlfriend were still in the house, the homeowner arrived home. Billy took him by surprise and drove a 12-inch butcher knife into the man's stomach. After stabbing the homeowner, the couple fled the

scene. Billy and his girlfriend hid out in her home. I took my position in the back of the house, covering the back door with my shotgun. It was loaded, with one round chambered. About an hour later, I saw Billy sneaking out the back door. It appeared to me that he was not intending to surrender but to escape somehow. I yelled to him to freeze or I would shoot! Billy froze for a moment then turned and ran back into the house. At this time the decision was made to go in with the police canine. Once we entered the house, Billy came out from hiding with his hands raised high in the air. I was the arresting officer. When it was just me and Billy at the police department, I heard in the depths of my heart, God saying to me, "Tell him that I love him and died for him." No sooner did the words leave my mouth, I saw his eyes well up with tears and tears streaming down his face.

"What's the matter, Billy? Why are you crying?"

"Nobody ever told me that they love me... not my father, not my mother. Now a cop is telling me that God loves me." It was a short time later, while visiting Billy in prison, that he surrendered his life to Jesus. I saw a new Billy come alive! He became a stellar inmate and a witness for Jesus. Two years later, while attending a chapel service in prison, Billy told a chapel volunteer about this cop who had a big impact on his life. The man called me and asked me if I would be willing to come into the prison and share my story. When I finally got there, I walked into a room filled with over a hundred inmates. They were all there, waiting for this cop to share his testimony. When I got up to speak, the words came flowing out, speaking of God's Love and His awesome Power to save and change lives. "If He can change me, He can change any one of you here!" To this day, I am still sharing and preaching of God's love and amazing grace. It's so true, that whatever the devil does to cause harm, God is right there, meaning it for good, Genesis 50:20.

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Day of Redemption

Jesus gave His Blood, His Life, so all your sins could be forgiven. Jesus paid your penalty for sin; in full.

Now it's up to you to accept or reject what Jesus has done for you.

God is inviting you into a personal relationship with Him as your Heavenly Father and Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Jesus came to show you the way because you are passionately loved and wanted. Jesus, before He was resurrected, said to His disciples, "...*He who has seen me has seen the Father.*" *John 14:9*

If you repent for breaking God's Law and put your trust in Jesus, when God looks at you, He will not see a liar, a thief, an adulterer, or a law breaker but he will see a person that Jesus has redeemed from the curse of the Law, one that Jesus paid the full penalty for their sin. God will see the Blood of Jesus that has washed you as white as snow. Only through Jesus can you be right with God.

You may go to the next page for more "Real Life Stories," or skip to page 46 for more truth.

CHAPTER 11

I Loved Police Shows

My greatest desire was to become a Police Officer.

My career started with an assignment to a foot post.

Two years later, my wife and I were married.

Six months later, I decided to leave my family and home...

My introduction to police work happened when I was only 5 years old. My Brother Al, who was twenty years older than me, joined the police force after serving in the Air Force for four years. I was intrigued with the stories he told me about his workday patrolling the town. As the years went on, I would watch the various Police shows on TV – Dragnet, Adam 12, and Police Story, to name a few.

My greatest desire was to become a Police Officer, so I majored in Police Administration. After receiving my degree, I became a Special Park Police Officer. I took the civil service exam and passed. I was appointed as a Police Officer for my hometown of West New York, NJ, one square mile with over fifty thousand people crammed into it. It is situated across the Hudson River from New York City between the GW Bridge and Lincoln Tunnel. At the start of my career, I was assigned to a foot post in our business district where I walked the beat for three years. During this time, I became acquainted with the shop owners and citizens who shopped and lived on my beat. Two years after joining the Department, my wife and I were married. Our life was good by the world's standards. We bought a home and were living the American Dream! We were married six and half years when we had a daughter.

Six months later, I didn't want to be a dad and married anymore. I left my family and home and went back to West New York to live on my own. I was doing what I wanted to do when I wanted to do it. After fifteen months of being away from my family and missing precious times with my daughter, my heart was prompted to return home to my family. My wife received Christ during my absence. I asked her if I could return home. She said I must meet with her Pastor, and I agreed. After an hour of talking with him, I also accepted Christ, knowing He

died on the cross for my sins because He loves us. It all made sense now, and I needed to make that decision to move forward with my family. My heart was open to the message of the Gospel, and I could see clearly. I wasn't in the dark anymore. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

After several months of attending church, our Pastor preached on prayer and how to ask God for help and intercession. I was working the midnight shift that night. When I arrived at work, I was advised that earlier we had a suspect wanted for a previous Aggravated Assault try to break into the victim's home. I immediately went to prayer while setting up the line-up. I asked that God to let him be apprehended on this shift to put an end to this.

After several hours of surveillance of the victim's home, it was assumed the suspect departed on a bus and was on his way back to New York City. Around 4am, I decided to join the patrol units out in the street. As I left headquarters and turned to go to Main Street, I noticed a person fitting the description of the suspect standing on the corner. I radioed headquarters and stopped him as he began to walk away from my sight. Backup arrived, and we detained him. We found a knife, toy gun, and glass cutter, which he had used to attempt entry into the victim's home. The mother of the victim made a positive identification of the suspect. He was placed under arrest for aggravated assault and attempted burglary. My original prayer was for him to be apprehended on this shift. By the grace of God he was, but I was the arresting officer. I was given a citation for the arrest, which I wore proudly. I always give God the credit for the citation, which came about from prayer.

We recently celebrated our 46th wedding anniversary. We also had two sons after we got back together. The daughter I left at six months old is now 40. She has been serving as a missionary with her husband and two children in Papua New Guinea for the past ten years. God is good!

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Day of Salvation

How do I get saved from the curse of the law? How do I get saved from being forever separated from God? How do I get saved from the Fires of Hell?

1. Admit that you have broken God's Law.
2. Ask God to forgive you.
3. Confess Jesus as the Son of God.
4. Confess that Jesus died on the cross for your sins.
5. Confess that Jesus arose from the dead.

The Bible says:

“For salvation that comes from trusting Christ — which is what we preach --- is already within easy reach of each of us; in fact, it is as near as our own hearts and mouths. For if you tell others with your own mouth that Jesus Christ is your Lord, and believe in your own heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in his heart that a man becomes right with God; and with his mouth he tells others of his faith, confirming his salvation. For the Scriptures tell us that no one who believes in Christ will ever be disappointed. Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect; they all have the same Lord who generously gives his riches to all those who ask him for them. Anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.”
Romans 10:8-13

This is GOOD NEWS!

For more “Real Life Stories,” turn to next page. To get saved, go to page 50.

CHAPTER 12

From Hotshot Crewman to Battalion Chief

My firefighting career began with the U.S Forest Service.

Working on a fire crew was a rough atmosphere.

Stuck in a firestorm, our vehicle was burning.

You could smell the rubber and electrical wires melting.

PTSD is a reality for most first responders...

I came from a family of eight kids, five boys and three girls. I had a Catholic background, which was beneficial since I learned a lot about the Ten Commandments. I learned a lot of good things, but it just wasn't enough for me. When I got into my teenage years, during my Confirmation classes, I started asking questions. The people I was asking would go to the priest and say, "He's asking these questions." When they came back, the answer was always, "Don't ask so many questions." I knew God, but I didn't know Jesus. I knew there was more.

After high school, I had to decide what I wanted to do. I looked around, and there were many different career opportunities. Ultimately, I decided that I wanted to do something that would be different every day. I started working with the U.S. Forest Service, and that's where I began my firefighting career. It was a rough atmosphere working on a fire crew. On your downtime, you'd go out, party, and end up doing things you shouldn't be doing.

My roommate at the time gave me a book titled "The Late Great Planet Earth" by Hal Lindsey. It was pretty popular at the time, in the '70s, and the Lord used it to bring me to Christ. I ended up getting to know Jesus through the back of the Bible – the Book of Revelation. At the end of Hal Lindsey's book, I read "The Romans Road." After reading it, I repented of my sins and accepted Jesus as my Savior. I prayed the

sinner's prayer. I didn't have a supernatural transformation like some people do, but that was in 1972 when I was born again.

I began to see Jesus working in my life and knew that it was Jesus doing it through His Holy Spirit. The scriptures I was reading started making sense. I'd like to say that I was perfect from that day forward, but I was not. As I grew, I realized we all fall short. He has continued to help me grow and trust in Him. After Jesus saved me, I wasn't afraid to die. It's not that I was reckless or wanted to die, but all my decisions about my career were based on my confidence in Christ. I always prayed about my situation and prayed before I made decisions. I know that I was in the palm of His hands.

I served a total of 37 years in the fire service. In 1972, I started my career with the U.S. Forest Service – Texas Canyon Hotshots. I then went to work for Santa Barbara County, then Burbank City, and later L.A. County. I eventually finished with L.A. County, and my last fire was in Texas Canyon, 37 years later. During my career, I worked as a hotshot crewman, firefighter, paramedic, engineer, and captain. I finished up as a battalion chief.

There's no doubt in my mind: there were many times when God spared my life from fire calls I had been on. There's no other explanation. One of those times was during the Honda Canyon Fire. In the early years of my career, I was part of the initial response crew to the Honda Canyon Fire in 1977. Four men lost their lives in that fire. Many were injured and burned. There were eight recorded overruns. I was in one of them. We were on our way to the Air Force base to meet with a one-star general when it happened. Fortunately, I had packed my gear and brought it with us. We used my fire shelter and put it around us in the car, praying the gas tank wouldn't blow up. After 10 minutes, the fire front had passed over us. Our vehicle was burning. You could smell the rubber and electrical wires melting. We were able to get out and escape. Some guys kept saying how lucky they were to survive. I don't believe in luck. I know it was the Lord protecting me.

Many changes came about in how crews fight wildfires after this event. The peak recorded wind gust during the firestorm was 192 mph. You can't fight a wildfire in a hurricane. It affected a lot of guys, some for

the rest of their lives. PTSD is a reality for most first responders. It's not that we born-again believers are immune to it, but when I accepted Christ and He took up residence in my heart, I haven't had to suffer like many others have. We Christians have a better way of handling it – through prayer, sharing, and support from other believers.

The Lord has taught me so much through firefighting and being a paramedic. I was on a rescue one time where I was doing CPR on a man who looked like he was in pretty good shape. I asked my captain, "How old is this guy?"

The captain said, "He's 75."

I said, "Wow! He's in pretty good shape for 75!"

The captain replied, "Joe, we're doing CPR on this guy. He's not in that good of shape!"

The Lord used that moment to show me that's how it is with people in our lives. We look at what they've got – the house, the car, the beautiful family. We assume everything is okay, but inside, they might be spiritually dead. The only way to save them is to share the gospel with them.

After serving 37 years, I'm now serving other firefighters through the Firefighters for Christ ministry. I currently serve as the president of the nonprofit organization. Our focus is to encourage firefighters to live their lives for Christ. The ministry has participated in medical missions, disaster reliefs, and training missions all over the world. The end goal is always to give them the gospel message of Jesus Christ.

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It's Time to Pray

If you have already confessed your sins and cried out to God, you are saved. If you have not, it's time that you do. Pray this right now:

Dear God,

I acknowledge You as the Creator of all things. I admit that I am a sinner, and I deserve the Fires of Hell. I kneel at Your feet and ask for Your mercy and forgiveness of my sins. I believe that Jesus Christ is Your son. I believe that Jesus died on the cross for my sins, and I believe that You raised Him from the dead. Jesus, please come into my heart and fill that place in my heart that belongs only to You. Jesus, I declare You Lord of my whole life today. I ask you to show me my life purpose, plan, and destiny for which I was born. Fill me with your Holy Spirit and with all the gifts you have for me. I will confirm my salvation by telling others what You have done for me. Thank You for saving me and giving me abundant life!

Now that you are a child of God, pray this prayer to your Father Daily!

My Father in Heaven,

Hallowed be Your name.

Your kingdom come.

Your will be done.

On earth as *it is* in heaven.

Give me this day my daily bread.

And forgive me my trespasses,

As I forgive those who trespass against me.

And lead me not into temptation,

But deliver me from the evil one.

For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

(Matthew 6:9-13)

For more "Real Life Stories," go to the next page. To find out what to do now that you're saved, go to page 54.

CHAPTER 13

The Front Lines

I joined the United States Marine Corps.

I signed my first Pro Wrestling contract.

I was sworn in as a Deputy in North Carolina and began my law enforcement journey...

I was born and raised in Hickory, North Carolina. Until I was ten years old, I was raised mostly by my mom. For the most part, I had a normal childhood. I was a kid who loved action movies and cartoons. I fell in love with the world of pro wrestling. Mom worked numerous jobs to provide for me and my siblings. I watched her suffer many times.

As a young boy, I remember hearing my mom being beaten in the room next to mine. All I could do was bury my head and pray. Even at that age, I remember talking to God. One thing I could always count on was Mom coming in to tuck me in, no matter what she was dealing with. She would always make time to kneel beside my bed and pray with me. During the summers, she made it a habit to send me on the little church bus to vacation Bible schools in town. Little did she know, she was planting seeds that would later grow in my life.

Around the age of ten, I reconnected with my father. Not long after, I decided I wanted to live with him. Living with Dad was exactly what I needed. A boy needs his father, and mine became my role model. He had battled pain and depression earlier in life, but when I moved in, he was a new man. Like Mom, Dad was a believer.

Living with Dad was a whole new world. We spent a lot of time with family, including big reunions a couple of times a year. Those are some of my favorite childhood memories. What stands out the most is going to church with the family. Dad and I started attending a small church built in the 1950s by my grandfather and other family members. My grandfather served as one of the pastors there until his passing in the 1970s. There was so much history in that little building.

I remember sitting with my dad and grandma during services. The

church was part of the Church of God denomination, and even as a young boy, I could feel something different there. The Spirit was present, even before I understood what that meant.

On March 15, 2000, during a revival week, the guest pastor made an altar call. I had seen many go to the altar weeping, praising, and laying it all down. That night, Jesus called me. It was a Revelation 3:20 moment: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock.” As Jesus knocked on my heart, my legs felt weak as I walked down the aisle and knelt at the altar. I answered the door, and Jesus welcomed me with open arms. I remember feeling my earthly father’s arms around me and my Heavenly Father’s love surrounding me. My walk with the Lord from that point on was a journey of learning – but oh, how the enemy comes to kill, steal, and destroy.

After the events of September 11, 2001, I decided to join the United States Marine Corps and fight for my country. On September 10, 2002, I stepped onto the yellow footprints at Parris Island and began my journey. It was a life-changing experience – one I wouldn’t trade for anything. On December 10, 2002, I stood on the parade deck as an honor graduate and received my Eagle, Globe, and Anchor.

My four years in the Marine Corps taught me so much, but they also opened doors that led me away from my relationship with the Lord. I began to drink and party. I became prideful and angry. No one could tell me anything. In 2006, I left the Marines after a tour in Iraq and began pursuing my boyhood dream of becoming a pro wrestler.

Between 2010 and 2014, I signed my first Pro Wrestling contract. Wrestling had always been my dream, and it soon became my idol. It defined me. During that time, I battled a pill addiction, anger, depression, and a deep emptiness. What would make me happy? Despite all of this, despite the Marines and wrestling, God never stopped speaking to me. At times, I didn’t want to hear it. I would wake up after drunken nights feeling heavy conviction and a whisper saying, “Chad, I have so much more for you.”

By 2014, I was in a dark place. I would return from the road to my one-bedroom apartment and weep. Many times, I prayed, “God, please don’t

let me wake up.” On the outside, I had it all – money, fame, and my dream job. On the inside, I was empty, trying to fill a hole that only Jesus could fill.

That year, I went off to camp to seek the Lord. I felt an overwhelming burden telling me to go. On that trip, God met me where I was. He reminded me that He had been calling me home through all my mess. Like the prodigal son, I realized He was always there, ready to welcome me, fill the void, and remind me I was never too far gone. Jesus came to die for me. He stood with me in the woods that day. I confessed my sins, and Jesus forgave me. He wrapped His arms around me and reminded me to focus on the cross.

God has done amazing things in my life. He brought godly men into my life who mentored me and encouraged me to share my story, opening doors for ministry. He allowed me to live my wrestling dream for 23 years. I’ve been in movies, video games, magazines, and more. God set me free from drugs, alcohol, anger, pride, and bitterness. He has used me to preach the Gospel many times. He gave me a daughter who reminds me daily that I must show her Christ through the way I live.

In 2023, God opened another door and helped me fulfill another dream. I was sworn in as a Deputy in North Carolina and began my law enforcement journey. I truly believe this is a ministry field like no other. Some are called to the pulpit, others to lead small groups. Some are called to the front lines, and God says, “I will use you here, My servant.”

Law enforcement has allowed me to see both the good and the bad, but it’s also given me opportunities to share Jesus in powerful ways. We encounter people consumed by drugs, gangs, and crime. In those moments, Jesus reminds me to share His love with those bound in chains. In this job, I get to point people to the ultimate chain-breaker.

Chad

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You Are a New Person

The Bible says:

“When someone becomes a Christian, he becomes a brand new person inside. He is not the same any more. A new life has begun!” 2 Corinthians 5:17

Say this:

I am a new person. I have a new life, a God centered life.

The Bible says:

“All these new things are from God, who brought us back to Himself through what Christ Jesus did. And God has given us the privilege of urging everyone to come into His favor and be reconciled to Him.” 2 Corinthians 5:18

God bridged the gap of sin between you and Him by Jesus dying on the cross. He now has given you the honor and privilege of telling people how to find that same favor with God through what Jesus has done for them.

The Bible says:

“He died for all so that all who live — having received eternal life from Him --- might live no longer for themselves, to please themselves, but to spend their lives pleasing Christ who died and rose again for them.” 2 Corinthians 5:15

Jesus died so you could have eternal life with Him in Heaven. Jesus is calling you to now live for Him, doing only those things with your life that would please Him.

To learn more about what you should now do, go to page 61.

CHAPTER 14

I Always Wanted to Be a Cop

The horrific experiences that come from being a police officer were really taking a toll on me.

Police work strained our marriage beyond repair.

I was ready to give up and throw in the towel...

I was born in Saginaw, Michigan in 1951. My mom was Catholic, and my dad claimed to be Protestant. He claimed that being Protestant meant he didn't need to go to church, so my mom took me and my two siblings to the Catholic Church and to catechism. Church was just part of the itinerary. I never understood what it meant to have a personal relationship with Christ. We had a very general knowledge about God.

We had a "normal family." My mom was a homemaker, and my dad worked at DOW Chemical. My dad was a genuine genius, and I am not exaggerating. He was a good dad, but one thing I never understood is why he never once said that he loved me. It was obvious that he favored my sister. My brother was an Elvis look alike. He had no trouble with finding a girlfriend, while I struggled with severe acne growing up. I never really had a girlfriend and always felt like I was out of place. I think this is when I decided to enjoy each day living for myself.

Towards the end of my high school years, I had a friend who had invited me to her church. It was a Pentecostal church. I had never seen people worship with such sincerity. It was a very impressionable memory moment for me.

Shortly after high school, I made a brash decision to join the Army. My mother was not happy with the decision. She had heard war stories about shoeshine suicide bombers and was convinced that I would never make it home alive. I spent three years in the military as a medic. I was stationed in Ft. Riley, Kansas. I never drank until the military. After

meeting and hanging out with the wrong guys, I started binge drinking. Again, I was living for me and my selfish desires.

My first marriage began when I was still in the military. It all happened so fast; we really didn't know each other. We had a son and adopted a child. When it was time to get out of the military, I was discharged on a Thursday. By Monday, we had a place to live and I found a job. This lasted about six months until I got a job at the Saginaw Police Department. I had always wanted to be a cop since I was six years old. It was in July of 74' when I joined, and after that is when it all went downhill. I started hanging around the wrong group of guys and started drinking and womanizing. Again, I was living for myself. We ended up getting a divorce and separating.

It was about six to eight months after the divorce that I met my second wife. She was working at the hospital while I was working one night processing a case. We ended up getting married and had two children. I never got along with her family, but it was not because of me. Her mother told me that I would never be good enough for her family.

It was about 1980 when I got laid off from Saginaw and went to work for Grayling Police Department. During my time at Saginaw the Lord had put a man of God in my life. He was a Sargent and a devout Christian. He was always there for me, and I know he had an influence on me. I know that the Lord put him in my life.

My marriage lasted 14 years. Eventually the pressure, shootings, and death threats resulting from police work strained our marriage beyond repair. We eventually got divorced. It was ugly and heartbreaking, with lying, stealing, and infidelity towards the end of it.

I met my current wife in Grayling, and we dated for five years. It was in 1995 when we married. She had a daughter from a previous marriage. By this time, I had been struggling with more and more health problems. The surmounting guilt and misery from my past sins along with the horrific experiences that come from being a police officer were really taking a toll on me. I had been asking God throughout my life to save me, but I never truly surrendered my life to Christ. I was ready to give up and throw in towel. It was in 1997 when I pulled into a city park and

broke down in my patrol car. I truly repented and asked Jesus to take over my life, and I would live for Him. I repented and asked for forgiveness from my sins. That is when I was born again. That's when everything changed.

The first thing I wanted to do was find a good Bible church. That's when I started going to Heritage Baptist Church. After I got saved, the Lord put a hunger in me for more of Him. Only the Holy Spirit can do that. I am so grateful that He gave me that desire for more of Him because it continues every day.

We eventually felt led to move down state to be closer to my stepdaughter. We eventually found Lakes Bible Church, and it has been so wonderful to have a teaching church where I have grown so much. Lord willing, I will continue to. Thank You, Jesus, for saving me.

Thank You, Jesus, for my deliverance. And I thank You, Jesus, for the gift of wanting more of You.

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CHAPTER 15

Pay Attention to the Pizza Hut

In Middle School, I learned about Law Enforcement Exploring.

My first assignment as an officer was a tough blue collar high crime area.

I looked up and saw the suspect running toward me.

I removed my finger from touch index to placing it on the trigger...

I grew up in a small town in the state of Maryland in the 1960s. We lived just outside of a military base. Both of my parents were schoolteachers, and I had one older brother. We, like many respectable people in the 60's and 70's, attended church even though we were not followers of Christ. My father took us on the military base to the Post Chapel. There, you could choose between the Catholic and Protestant services. We went to the Protestant one.

At age 13, I attended a Vacation Bible School at the Chapel. It was there that I heard a clear presentation of the Gospel for the first time, along with an invitation. It all made sense to me. I realized that I was a sinner and that Christ died for my sins. All I had to do was put my faith and trust in Him. So I did!

I soon had a desire to learn more, so I discovered that there were Christian radio stations that had some of the best Bible teachers from around the nation. I began listening daily.

It was around this same time in Middle School that I learned about Law Enforcement Exploring. My town police department sponsored such a group. I joined and was amazed at all the things I could learn. I participated in traffic control details, working the dispatch desk taking and receiving emergency calls and spending many hours on ride-alongs. After graduation from college, I had prayed about where to work,

and God pointed me to the Baltimore County, Maryland Police Dept. I applied and was hired.

My first assignment after graduation was the Essex Precinct. This was a tough blue collar high crime area. During my first year, I had to patrol day shift on Christmas Day. Prior to the shift, the Lord prompted me to go the Dollar Store and buy 4 matchbox cars. I did and put them each in a paper bag, stapled them shut, and went to work. As I was driving around this poor neighborhood, I would pull up to kids and ask them what they got for Christmas. Most would mention a few things, and I would smile and drive on.

I made a left turn down Doolittle Alley, and I saw 3 boys on the side of the alley. I stopped and asked them what they got for Christmas. The one boy dropped his head and said that their parents could not afford anything. I put my car in park and said, "Let me see about that." I looked down and grabbed the four packages I had. When I looked back up, the three boys had turned into four boys. I handed them the packages. Their eyes lit up as they tore open the packages and thanked me for the gifts.

As I drove off, I felt the Lord saying to me, "Pay attention to what happened this morning. If you follow Me, I can use you in this line of work. You will meet people who will never step foot in a church, but you get to step foot into their homes and their lives." I will never forget that lesson.

My favorite assignment came many years later as the Sergeant of the Community Outreach Team in White Marsh. I really enjoyed this position because it involved a diversity of functions. We could conduct an elementary school presentation in the morning and participate in a drug or gun search warrant later in the same day.

One evening while working a plain cloths assignment and patrolling one of our troubled neighborhoods, I observed a group of juveniles standing in the middle of the street. As I drove by, they barely moved out of the road. This was one of the complaints that the neighbors shared during the last Police Community Relations Council Meeting. So, as I drove by them, I intended to turn around in the shopping center at the end of the road and come back. If they did the same thing again, I was going to get

out and let them know what I thought about their behavior.

When I entered the shopping center, something very interesting happened. The Lord very clearly said to me, “Pay attention to the Pizza Hut.” This was not out loud, but it was very strong and unusually clear. I turned the car around and parked so that I could watch the front door of the restaurant. Suddenly, a suspect came running out of the restaurant toward the back of the shopping center. I radioed my dispatcher that a possible robbery had just occurred. I gave out his description. There was another problem. It all happened at shift change, and most officers were in the station. We did have an early car that came on the road an hour early to help cover shift change issues, but they could be anywhere.

As I called in the incident, the early car “just happened” to be on the other side of the shopping center. She saw the suspect running behind the homes and gave chase on foot. I drove down the street looking for a cut between the row houses to jump out and engage in the chase. When I located a break in the houses, I made a right turn, jumped the curb, and prepared to exit my car. I looked up and saw the suspect running toward me. With my radio in my left hand and my gun in my right, I ordered the suspect to stop and get on the ground. He did not.

As he continued to close the distance, I removed my finger from touch index to placing it on the trigger. I ordered him again to stop and get on the ground. He continued toward me. As he got closer, I noticed the thousand-mile stare in his eyes as if he was looking right through me. He finally stopped right in front of me. I reached up with my radio hand, grabbed him, and pulled him to the ground. The other officer arrived, and we placed him under arrest. He had a gun in one pocket and \$800 cash in the other. He was wanted for robbing over 15 establishments.

I did receive an award for the arrest, but I always remembered the truth of the matter – God told me to watch the Pizza Hut. Had I not listened, who knows what could have happened in this case or in some of his potential future robberies.

Randy

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What Do I Do Now?

1. Get a Bible, and read it every day. (Start in the New Testament.)
2. Find a church, and attend every time the doors are open.
3. Attend Bible studies and other Christ-centered meetings.
4. Pray every day – morning, noon, and night.
5. Tell people what Jesus has done for you.
6. Write out your Real Life Story, your testimony, and give it to people.
7. Make a public profession of your faith by being baptized in water.
8. Shout. Yes, Shout! Friend, you have something to shout about. You've been set free. Death cannot hold you, and Hell can't have you. You belong to God. No matter what happens in this life, as long as you continue to walk with Him, you will be with Him in Heaven.

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