

MY STORIES OF FAITH

Eric Elder

My Stories of Faith
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Introduction:

The Gift of Faith

When I first put my faith in Christ, He gave me a gift of faith. I thought every Christian received the same gift. In that moment, I suddenly believed God could do anything, absolutely anything. I believed the whole Bible was true, from cover to cover. I believed anything God did in the past He could do again. And I believed He could do even greater things than these—even through me. As Jesus said, “Truly, I tell you, whoever believes in Me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these...” (John 14:12).

It wasn’t until several years later, when I took a spiritual gifts “inventory,” that I realized God had given me a “gift” of faith, a supernatural gift to believe God can do supernatural things. And it was then that I realized God wanted me to use this gift as He wanted all of us to use our gifts—for building up others in their faith. Or, as the Apostle Paul says, “to equip His people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attain-

ing to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12-13).

But I wondered how to do this. As I asked others, they said that whenever I would tell them my stories of faith—how God had worked in my life—they were encouraged in their faith to believe that God could work in their lives too.

Yes! That made sense. When people needed a boost in their faith, I could give them some of mine. Isn’t that the way with all of our gifts? When people need wisdom or money or healing or help or encouragement, we share with them whatever wisdom or money or healing or help or encouragement we have been given (see 1 Corinthians 12-14).

So I began that day sharing my stories of faith in a more intentional way—writing them down, sending them out, and telling them to others when they needed a lift.

And that’s what I’m doing with this book for you. If you need a boost in your faith, if you need to believe that God can do something impossible for you, if you need to know that God is real, that He loves you, that He is FOR you and has a purpose for your life, then this book is for you. Because, along with hope and love, faith is one of the top three things we all need in life (see 1 Corinthians 13:13).

With that as an introduction, I’d like to begin telling you a few of my stories of faith, starting with the day I was born. Well, not that

far back! I'll start with the day I was born again, at age 23, the day I put my faith in Christ—and He put His gift of faith in me.

Eric Elder

May 25, 2020

P.S. I read these stories online each night during April and May of 2020. In addition to the stories, I shared more scriptures, a song, and a prayer to help people relax, unwind, and keep God at the forefront of their minds. You can watch the whole series, called "Bedtime Stories of Faith," at ericelder.com.

Happy Birthday, Eric

I was born on May 8, 1963. I was born again on February 9, 1987. And God gave me more than one gift on *that* birthday.

I had been wrestling with my faith in the months leading up to that day. I had been wrestling with it for years, really, but especially in those months leading up to that day.

Although I grew up in a Christian home and went to church nearly every Sunday for 23 years, there was one hurdle that kept me from becoming a Christian: I didn't believe in Jesus. He seemed okay to me, but whether or not He really lived didn't matter much to me.

I remember reading in my junior high Sunday School class that Jesus said, "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life... whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son" (John 3:16,18).

I asked my Sunday School teacher about it, saying that according to Jesus, I wasn't going to go to heaven because I didn't believe in Him.

She said, "Oh, Eric. You're such a good kid, you'll get into heaven."

I said, “But Jesus said I have to believe in Him, and I don’t!”

She meant well, I know, but I left wondering if it was true, what Jesus said. But I didn’t know what to do about it.

Fast forward ten years, and I still didn’t know what to think. I had graduated from high school and college and moved from my hometown of Chenoa, Illinois, to take a job with a company in Houston, Texas. In Houston, I started going to church with a cousin who lived there. We went on a weekend retreat with a couple hundred singles from the church to enjoy a few days in the country, hiking and boating and doing zip lines in the woods. We sang worship songs and listened to a speaker talk about Jesus.

After one of these talks, we broke up into small groups to talk about what we had just heard.

“Who is Jesus to you?” was the question we were supposed to discuss.

I felt safe in that environment, so when it was my turn to answer, I said, “I’m not sure I really believe in Jesus.”

One of the men in my group asked if I’d like to come join him and several other men who met weekly at his house to study the Bible and learn more about Jesus. I thought that sounded great and said, “Yes.”

Before we left the retreat that weekend, during the closing segment to hear from any-

one who wanted to share about what God had done in their lives during the weekend, a woman stood up and said she had just put her faith in Jesus and was so thankful.

I thought, “How can a person do that? How can they just decide one day they believe in Jesus?”

I wondered if she was even telling the truth.

To my surprise, I was about to discover that she was—as I was soon to make that same decision myself.

A Big Bag of Books

One of the questions that first came up in our weekly men's Bible study was whether or not we knew for sure we were going to heaven. We were studying the book of John and what Jesus said about the topic. About ten of us were sitting in a circle in a living room and one by one we started answering.

I went first, saying I was about 90% sure. I felt I had been pretty good, but I didn't want to seem so arrogant to say any higher.

The man sitting next to me said he was 100% sure he was going to heaven! I thought that was *more* than a little arrogant and based on the little that I knew about him, I thought his percentage was a little high.

On we went around the room. The next man said he was 100% sure he'd go to heaven, too. And the next and the next and the next and the next: 100%, 100%, 100%, 100%. Back to me: 90%.

They said, "Eric, the difference between 90% and 100% will change your life."

"Okay," I thought. But I had no idea how to make that leap.

About six months later, we began a study of the book in the Bible called Romans. The leader said we should all get four books that would be helpful for our study: 1) a good study

Bible, 2) a *Strong's Concordance* that listed definitions of every word in the Bible and where each word occurred, 3) a *Greek Interlinear Bible* showing a verse-by-verse comparison of the original Greek text of the New Testament and its corresponding text in English, and 4) a *Vine's Expository Bible* describing each verse and the context in which it was written.

I assumed this was just what people did when they studied the Bible, so I went to a Christian bookstore for the first time in my life and looked for each of these items. A new study Bible had just come out in 1984 called the *New International Study Bible*. I liked the way it was described, with a team of scholars who had put it together, translating the original Hebrew of the Old Testament books (which were written before the time of Christ) and the Greek of the New Testament (written during and after the time of Christ). The translation was written using everyday language that was both faithful to the original text and read well in English. This version was also filled with footnotes on nearly every verse, explaining more about the original words and meanings and history that was taking place at the time the words were written.

I walked out of the store with a very heavy bag—the *Strong's Concordance* alone was 10"x12"x3" and over 1,200 pages, certainly the largest book I had ever bought in my life!

I went home with my big bag of books and curiously began reading the Study Bible, the first Bible I had intentionally bought for myself to read and learn what it said.

I was amazed! The words came alive before my eyes. I felt like I was reading that day's newspaper, not words written over 4,000 years ago. It was fresh and relevant and made so much sense. I read the description of the seven days of creation as if I were there myself, watching it happen.

When I finished reading for the day, I looked forward to the next day when I could pick it up again. I read every verse and every footnote, looking up words in the *Strong's Concordance* to make sure I knew what the words meant as best I could.

I loved it! I had discovered a treasure trove of insight and understanding into my life that I had never explored so deeply. I couldn't wait to keep reading more.

A Life-Changing Question

About six months after the retreat where I openly confessed that I didn't know what to believe about Jesus, a man in my Bible study asked me a life-changing question. We were then studying the book of Romans and the topic came up of "God's wrath."

God's wrath, as it was described in chapter 1 of Romans, wasn't about Him destroying people. He didn't want anyone to die. It was about Him turning people over to their own sinful desires, giving them the freedom to choose Him or to choose their own way—even if it broke His heart. "Therefore, God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts...to do what ought not to be done" (Romans 1:24a,18b). The end result, the Bible says in verse 32, would unfortunately be death.

As we talked that night, I learned the Bible says that *all* of us have sinned, and the penalty for sin is death: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23) and "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23a).

I disagreed.

I didn't think this was right.

I knew I wasn't perfect, but I didn't think I had done anything so wrong that I would get the death penalty or even go to jail.

I didn't mean to sound arrogant, but I told the guys I didn't think I had done anything for which I would die.

One of them asked me, not unkindly, "Why don't you ask God what He thinks about how good you've been?"

I thought it was a fair question. I went home that night and decided to ask God. Just before I prayed, though, I got nervous. "What if it was true?" I wondered. "What if I really have done something for which I might die?"

But I wanted to know the truth. Either the Bible was true and what I believed was wrong or what I believed was true and the Bible was wrong. They couldn't both be true. And I wanted to know the truth. So I decided to ask God.

Within two weeks, God answered my prayer.

Born Again

As I continued reading through the book of Romans on my own, I came across a list of sins, some of which I had done. At the end of the list, the Bible said, “Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do those things, but they approve of those who practice them” (Romans 1:32).

As I looked at the sins on this list, I suddenly became aware of just how truly destructive they could be. And since I had done some of them, I knew they could destroy me, too.

I had chosen to do what I wanted to do without regard for what God wanted me to do. In the end, those choices would kill me—not because God wanted me to die, but because I would be simply reaping what I had sown.

I was cut to the heart. I was suddenly so sorry for what I had done. I didn’t want to die.

But what could I do about it now? I couldn’t undo what I had done. And if I died as a result of doing those things, I would only be getting what was coming to me.

I was caught in a dilemma that I didn’t know how to resolve.

That night I went with my cousin to hear a missionary speak. He was talking about Jesus and why He came to earth—to pay the price

for our sins by giving up His life for us so we could go free.

I had probably heard that message many times before. But if you don't think you're a sinner, you don't think you need a Savior. Now that I was aware of my sins, I realized Jesus was the answer to my dilemma. I didn't want to die, and God didn't want me to die, so He sent Jesus to willingly die in my place so I could go free.

I was overwhelmed at the thought of it. That Jesus loved me so much that He would take my place on the cross to pay for the sins I had willingly committed.

I had never felt such a love in my life. The closest thing to this kind of love was with a girlfriend in college, Lana. I wanted to pick up the phone to call her and tell her what I was feeling.

As I reached for the phone, I heard these words in my head: "Talk to Me."

I wasn't sure what to do with them, so I reached for the phone a second time.

"Talk to me," I heard again.

I still didn't know what was happening, so I reached for the phone a third time. And for the third time, I heard these words: "Talk to Me."

I knew it was God. I set down the phone and got on my knees on my bed. I buried my head in my pillow and cried. I told God how sorry I was for all I had done, how sorry I was

that I couldn't take it back, and I couldn't make up for it myself.

But I couldn't believe the love I felt from Him, that He was offering a way to wipe my slate clean if I would put my faith in Jesus. I couldn't believe it, but I knew it was true.

I put my faith in Jesus that night, asking Him to forgive me of all my sins. I asked Him to fill me with His Holy Spirit to help me do the things He wanted me to do so I could live the life He wanted me to live.

I told Him I loved Him and wanted to follow Him the rest of my life. I asked Him to call the shots from there on out, not only to be my Savior, but to be my Lord as well.

In that moment, I was born again.

That's how Jesus described it to Nicodemus in the Bible: "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (John 3:3).

I felt like I had been born again, too. I woke up the next morning to a whole new life. It was as if God had picked me up from the path I was on, turned me around, and set me down on a new path, pointed in a whole a new direction.

I suddenly believed the Bible was true from cover to cover. I believed God could do whatever He said He could do. And I finally knew with 100% certainty that I was going to heaven—not because of what I had done, but because of what Jesus had done for me. As the

men in my Bible study had said, the difference between 90% and 100% would change my life. And they were right. It did. It changed the trajectory of the rest of my life, both here on earth and in the life to come.

You really can know for sure that you are going to heaven. And God *wants* you to know it! As the Apostle John says, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may *know* that you have eternal life” (I John 5:13).

If you’ve never put your faith in Christ, do it today! And if you’ve already put your faith in Christ, let this be a reminder to you that God still loves you, still cares about you, and still has an abundant life in store for you, both now and forever in heaven.

To finish the verse I quoted in part earlier, “For the wages of sin is death...,” the rest of the verse says, “but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 3:23).

Fasting

My first fast was at age 24. I was living in Houston, Texas, and reading in the Bible about fasting—giving up food for a period of time for the purpose of deepening your prayer life.

Jesus said, “When you fast...” then gave instructions about it. I was intrigued that He said “When you fast” not “If you fast.” It was as if fasting was to be a regular part of a Christ-following life.

I read a few articles on fasting and decided to try it for myself for three to five days. I had never gone that long without food, so I wasn’t sure what to expect physically *or* spiritually. I had read that people would often still drink some kind of liquid to stay hydrated—water, juice or broth—but food was given up.

I started my fast one morning, and that first day I was *so* hungry. My body’s built-in reaction was to *increase* my desire for food. I was fascinated by this reaction to missing a meal which God had hardwired into our systems. It ensured we would seek out the energy we needed to sustain our lives.

Then my head started to hurt and I was less fascinated! All I could think about, it seemed, was food. I tried to pray more, knowing that this was the reason I was fasting, but it was difficult to concentrate. I went to bed that

night wondering how I would make it three to five days. The next morning, however, I felt much better. My headache was gone and instead of a hunger for food, I felt a hunger for God.

I had already planned to take a day off work so I could focus on praying, so the second day I took my Bible, a pen, and my journal to the pool at my apartment complex. I was all alone there and had plenty of time to pray, so I began praying through a list of things I had been collecting to pray about during this time.

One of the things on my list was to pray for a former girlfriend about a job decision she was trying to make. We had talked on the phone the week before as we still stayed in touch from time to time. She shared with me that she wasn't sure if she should stay at her current job or not. I told her I was planning this time of fasting and prayer, and I said I would pray for her. I had no idea how that prayer would change both of our lives.

My First Fast

As I began to pray for my former girlfriend's job, I began to feel that she really shouldn't be working in the corporate world at all. What she needed, I thought, was a husband who could take care of her financially so she could be free to stay at home, raise a family, and do whatever else she felt she should do without having to work for money.

"That's what she really needs, Lord," I prayed, "a husband."

As soon as I prayed that, these words came into my mind: "Why don't you marry her?" I thought I was losing my mind. This fasting must be making me delirious. I shut my journal and went on with my day, wondering where that thought came from.

It wasn't that I didn't love her. I did. But a year earlier I felt God wanted me to break up with her for reasons I didn't understand at the time. We had both given our lives to Christ in the time since our breakup, so we were both starting fresh again. Maybe God *did* have something more in mind for us.

I didn't really believe it, but even after I ended my fast a few days later, the question I had heard at the pool was still at the forefront of my mind, "Why don't you marry her?"

And it never left me until the day I finally asked her to marry me almost a year later. We were married five months after that and went on to have six kids together and 23 wonderful years of marriage until she passed away all too soon at the age of 48. She stayed home with our kids after our first child was born and never went back to working in the corporate world again.

To say that fasting and prayer has changed my life would be a serious understatement. I was sold, and I've been fasting and praying ever since.

My 21-Day Fast

I don't often talk about my fasts as Jesus encourages His disciples to fast in secret, drawing closer to God, not drawing attention to themselves (see Matthew 6:6-18). But there's still value in sharing what we've experienced through fasting. Even Jesus shared his experiences, as did Moses and David and others in the Bible and in the present day. That's how we know about those stories.

I've always been encouraged by such stories, both biblical and contemporary, so I'd like to share a few of mine to encourage you.

I've fasted for three days, five days, seven days, 21 days, and even 40 days. I've fasted for one day a month for four years, praying for the president of the United States at the time, as someone had encouraged as many as could to do so. I've fasted from one meal a week for a period of several months, encouraged by the methodical approach to fasting and prayer by John Wesley, the founder of the "methodists," hence the methodical approach to fasting.

But the most effective fasts for me have been those where I've had something weighing on my heart, something I've felt needed extra attention, extra prayer support, extra focus for a period of time until I sensed something was happening. Those are the special times when

I've seen the clearest connection between my prayers and God's answers.

"Don't you get weaker when you fast?" people sometimes ask me. "How can you fast and still get anything done?"

I've actually found the opposite to be true. After the initial hunger pangs die down—which they naturally do after a day or two as your body adjusts to the new reality and stops sending those dire signals to your brain that you "must eat"—I get a strength from fasting that I don't get any other way.

I was once fasting for a week while teaching a computer class for a national seminar company. I was teaching eight hours a day to different audiences in different cities every day. By the fifth day, I would have thought I would have been totally worn out—even without fasting. But I had gained so much strength from the fast that one of the seminar students came up to me after class that fifth day and, not knowing I had been fasting, remarked about how much energy I had as a teacher. "What's your secret?" she asked me. I confessed that I was surprised about it myself, as I hadn't eaten anything for five days straight.

Jesus said, "I have food to eat which you do not know about" (John 4:32). He also said, "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every Word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). I had seen this at work in my own three-day, five-day, and ten-day fasts.

But what about longer fasts, I wondered, say 21 or 40 days?

I asked my doctor when I was considering a 21-day fast, “How long can a person safely go without food?” He said he thought I could go 21 or even 40 days as long as I paid attention to my body. So I decided to try a 21-day fast.

During that fast, I drank mostly water, occasionally adding some watered-down fruit juice or weak broth made from boiling some vegetables—cabbage, potatoes, carrots, etc.—then drinking only the liquid. The idea was to keep hydrated throughout my fast while also giving myself a little extra energy and, honestly, a break from water from time to time. The idea, physically, is to not reactivate the stomach acids which are produced any time food is reintroduced, which would happen with any kind of solid food or even any liquids with more substance to them like milk. Once the stomach acids are reactivated, the hunger pangs and headaches are reactivated as well if the food doesn’t continue coming.

Spiritually, during that 21-day fast, I was praying about my job and whether or not I should do something different career-wise. I had my answer to that question within three days—to stay the course where I was—so I spent the rest of the 21 days praising God and praying, thoroughly enjoying my time with Him.

I told my family I was fasting because they would know soon enough anyway, but I didn't tell others. I was surprised I could sit with them for meal after meal and not eat, yet not be crazy watching them eat, either! My stomach had shut down after the first few days, and I was able to thoroughly enjoy my time with my family as well, even cooking for them often throughout the time. My "food" really did come from heaven.

It was a bold and fruitful experience for me, but it was several more years before I attempted something even bolder and more fruitful: a 40-day fast.

My 40-Day Fast

Back in 1994, a man named Bill Bright, the founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, did his first of many 40-day fasts. The experience was so powerful that by 1998, he said he was praying for two million Christians to fast and pray for 40 days by the year 2000.

Having done several extended fasts by then myself, I was interested in trying this, but could never quite commit myself to actually doing it. There never seemed to be a good time to give up food for 40 days! There was always a holiday or a special event or some kind of activity going on that I didn't feel I could commit to 40 days in a row. That, plus, I didn't know if I could actually make it that long.

The year 2000 came and went, but I still hoped I could do it at some point. That point came in 2004, when I was seriously considering leaving full-time ministry to go back into secular work. I was getting worn down by trying to continually minister to more and more people while also having to continually raise more and more funds to do the ministry.

So I decided it was time for me to do a 40-day fast to pray for two things. The first was to pray for a revival in America that Bill Bright was calling for, and the second was for clarity about my own calling for the next season of

my life. I also decided to go through the book of Exodus during at the same time, looking for clues about how Moses made it through his years of fulfilling God's calling and leading an entire nation of hundreds of thousands of people through the desert for 40 years. Moses, too, had done not just one but two 40-day fasts during which God had spoken powerfully to him and to the people of Israel.

As it happened to me on my 21-day fast, I knew within three days of my 40-day fast that God was calling me to stay the course, to continue my ministry, and that He would somehow give me strength and the wisdom and the resources to do it.

So with that question answered, I was able to spend the rest of my 40 days praying for revival and listening closely to whatever God had to say to me. Every day, I spent some time reading in the book of Exodus until I found a lesson I felt God wanted me to apply to my life. Sometimes it was to stand still when my back was up against a sea. Sometimes it was raising my hands and my heart towards heaven and watching the sea split in front of me so I could walk through it.

I also learned from the book of Exodus how Moses was encouraged by his father-in-law to delegate to others whatever he could so Moses could focus on what he alone could do. Each day I would write down a verse from Exodus which I could focus on, and also one

practical thing I could do based on that insight, whether I did it right then or made note of it to do in the future.

At the end of my 40 days, which *was* a long time to go without food, I had 40 little hotel-sized sheets of paper with 40 verses from Exodus to focus on with 40 things to do for the next season of my ministry. In the months that followed, I followed the plan that God had laid out for me during these 40 days, starting with building a new website for my ministry to recruiting volunteers and doing the fundraising that I needed to do to do the work. Because of this, I was able to relaunch my ministry in a stronger, more sustainable way.

Not only did my 40-day fast result in an action plan that carried me from then until now, but I also wrote down all the lessons I learned from that experience in order to help others learn from them, too. Those writings turned into a devotional book called *Exodus: Lessons in Freedom—How to Get Free, Stay Free and Set Others Free*. That book became the first of more than a dozen books I've written in a similar way, going through a book of the Bible and focusing on whatever God has to say to me through it. This has become my de facto approach for reading and writing about the Bible ever since, learning what I can, and doing what I can do, then sharing that wisdom with others.

All these years later, I'm still in full-time ministry, and I'm still sharing with others what I'm learning along the way—all of which is fruit from that 40-day fast in which I was so intensely seeking God's face and His will for my life.

You might think there's not a good time to give up food for 40 days. I agree! My fast was during November and December, right in the midst of Thanksgiving and Christmas—probably the worst time to give up food! But I've learned that even though there's never a good time to give up food, there's always a good time to get closer to God.

If you've never fasted before, or haven't done so lately, I'd encourage you to give it a try. Whether it's for three days or five days or 21 or 40, there's always a good time to get closer to God.

A Sabbatical

When Lana and I were dating, she told me she'd love to have twelve kids someday. She was one of nine and said she didn't think that was enough. She always wished there were more kids around to play with! So when we got married, I knew that once we started having kids, I would be working for a very long time without a break to provide for our family.

I decided it would be nice to take some time off before we started having kids to do three things I really wanted to do more: to read the Bible, to pray, and to play the piano. I thought three months would be a good amount of time to do these things. A friend of mine had just had knee surgery and was off work for a few months before going back, and our office went on fine without him. I wondered if maybe I could ask for three months off, without pay, but rather than be laid up with an injured knee, I could do those things that were important to me.

Lana agreed, as she was still working and we would have her income. When I went to ask my boss, I had no idea what he would say, as I had never heard of anyone doing this before. To my surprise, he said, "Yes"! He asked when I wanted to do it, and I gave him some dates. I felt there was a particular Friday that I

should start this three-month sabbatical—as I learned it was called in the Bible; a time of rest from doing normal work, based on the word “sabbath”—a sabbatical. When I looked closer at the calendar, though, I realized if I started my sabbatical on the following Tuesday, I would get paid for the previous weekend, plus some extra because it was also a holiday weekend. The difference in income would be about \$1,000.

It would have been nice to have the extra \$1,000, especially since I wasn’t going to be getting paid for the next three months. But as I prayed about it, I felt very impressed that I should still start my sabbatical on that Friday. It didn’t quite make sense financially, but I decided to follow that impression. God had surprisingly worked out everything else for this idea, so I wanted to follow His lead.

When that Friday came, I decided to take a long drive to visit my mom and dad back in Illinois, about 18 hours north of where we were living in Texas. I got on the road and was shocked when I arrived.

My mom, who had been battling a return of breast cancer from ten years earlier, was not doing well at all. She had not told me when we talked on the phone because I was newly married and she didn’t want to worry me. Her physical condition had deteriorated, though, so rapidly that I couldn’t believe my eyes.

She was, it appeared, in her very last days. And from what she told me, she was ready to go.

I soon switched from praying for her healing to praying for God's mercy to let her go. Three days later, I was able to hold her hand as she passed from this life to the next.

I'm so thankful I started my sabbatical when I did so I could be with her for those last three days of her life. Had I waited till Tuesday, I would have had \$1,000. God is so gracious.

Two months later, my dad had a stroke, and I was able to spend several weeks with him during his recovery before I had to go back to work.

And yes, God did honor my desire to spend much of that time doing what I had set out to do: reading the Bible, praying, and playing the piano. He also used that time in a special way, going far beyond what I had in mind.

Nine months later, we started having those babies Lana wanted.

My Piano

I love playing the piano. I've played since I was a kid, taking lessons along with my brother and sister from Mrs. Eash, who was also our music teacher at school.

I seldom, if ever, played for others. In part, this was because I didn't feel confident in my abilities, but also in part because I just enjoyed playing for myself—hearing a song come together out of my own fingers from the sheet music in front of me. It was immensely satisfying.

After college, when I moved to Houston, I bought my own piano—a \$350 used, upright piano that I enjoyed playing, but it didn't hold its tune very well.

After about ten years of playing on it, I wished I had something that sounded a little better—one that could at least hold its tune so I could truly enjoy my personal times of playing.

I mentioned my desire to a Christian friend, asking if she would pray with me about it.

She said she would, then she added, “Why don't you go to a piano store and pick one out, then ask God for it?”

I immediately said, “No, I don't even want to look. I'll probably see one I really like, then

I'll be frustrated that I can't get it. I don't need anything special, just something that will hold its tune better than this one."

But my friend wouldn't let up. "I think you should look," she said.

Reluctantly, I decided to take her advice. I went to a piano showroom about twenty miles away and started looking over their collection.

I always loved playing a grand piano whenever I had a chance. I loved playing my great aunt's grand piano at her house on Lake Michigan in her wide-open front room that overlooked the lake or playing a friend's baby grand in the music room of her Victorian-style house or playing another friend's full-sized grand piano in her parents' wooded and windowed home in their high-vaulted living room. I could, and would, play for hours whenever they would let me.

But a grand piano seemed out of the question. I had no idea how much they cost, but I had only seen them in the grandest of settings. When I walked into the showroom, I did see an old, dilapidated-looking grand piano in the corner. *Now that's probably the one for me*, I thought. I walked up to it not caring how it looked, only caring how it sounded. But when I started to play it, it sounded even worse than it looked! It was even worse than my old upright at home.

I worked my way through the showroom, playing uprights and grands until I finally end-

ed up at what was obviously the best piano in the whole store—a brand-new Steinway Model B—a full-sized, seven-foot grand piano with an understated black matte finish. It was beautiful. But how would it sound? I had yet to find a piano in the showroom that sounded good to my ear.

I trepidatiously sat down in front of this last piano and played a “C” chord, just three notes pressed down together.

It was the most beautiful “C” chord I had ever heard in my life.

I got up and stood behind the bench next to the salesman who was helping me. “How much is it?” I asked.

“\$42,000,” he said. “It’s the best piano we have.”

I was dumbstruck. I had no idea they even made a piano that expensive. But that “C” chord! I had never played a piano that sounded so beautiful.

I regained my composure and by faith decided to say out loud what I was thinking in my head. I told the salesman, “I’m going to ask God for this piano.”

As soon as I said it, I heard these words in my head, “I’ll give you this piano—or a better one.”

I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. How could God possibly give me this piano? And what piano could possibly be better than this one?

I sat down and played the piano a little more, then tried to play some of the others in the showroom again. Nothing compared to the Steinway Model B. Nothing even came close.

My fears had come true. I had found the piano I really wanted, but there was no way I could ever afford it.

And I couldn't imagine ever finding a better one.

Until I did.

My Father's Love

Over the next few months, I kept thinking and praying about that grand piano. Could it be that God really did want to give me that piano or a better one? I tried to think of ways I could ever buy such a piano, or who I might ask to help me buy one, but I always reached a dead end.

Over the weekend, I went to a Christian men's event and one of the speakers challenged us to consider our relationships with our own fathers. How many of us ever heard our fathers tell us that they loved us? Many never had. As I thought back, I couldn't ever remember hearing those words myself. Not that my relationship with my father was ever strained in any way, but I couldn't remember him ever saying those words to me, "I love you."

Then the speaker went further and got to the heart of the challenge. How many of us had ever told our fathers that we loved them? As I thought about that question, I came up blank again. The speaker asked us to consider saying those words out loud to our fathers when we got home, even as awkward as it may be. I decided to do it, sensing how significant it might be.

When I got home, I mentioned the idea to my wife, Lana.

She said, "Eric, I wasn't going to tell you this, because it was supposed to be a surprise. But your Dad came over this weekend and asked if he could do something for you. He said he knew you didn't like your piano and wished you had a better one, so he wanted to bring over the piano from his house that you grew up playing. Even though it wasn't new, he thought it was better than what you had."

Lana continued, "He was going to load it into his truck by himself, make a ramp to get it up our front steps, and then take your piano back to his house. He wanted to surprise you with it when you got back home. But I wasn't sure if you would want him to do that and that he might want to check with you first."

I was dumbstruck again. My father was in his 70's, had been through a stroke and open-heart surgery, and was going to do all of that, by himself, just to surprise me and help me get something he knew I wanted.

I thought through other things he had done for me over my lifetime, from stringing a zip line from the second floor of our barn to a tree 75 feet away, to attending my music concerts and dance recitals and Cub Scout pinewood derbies. I may not have been able to remember a time when my dad said that he loved me, but I couldn't doubt that he did love me because of the ways he showed me.

I cried at the thought of it. I called my dad, told him I would love to have his piano, and I helped him move it into my house.

As I sat down to play it for the first time, it sounded even better than the Steinway Model B in the showroom, because it came with my father's love.

God had done it. He had given me a piano that was better than the one I had prayed for. I was fully content that God had kept His word, even if the answer came in a way that I hadn't expected.

But God wasn't finished with the story yet. He still had one more thing in mind.

By the way, I brought lunch over to my dad's house a few days later, and while we were eating at his kitchen table, I looked him in the eye and said, "Dad, I just wanted to say I love you." The circle was complete.

The King

A few months after I received my childhood piano from my dad, I received a job offer from a church near Dallas, Texas.

We sold our cute little house in Illinois and bought a house in Dallas. The net gain on the selling and buying was \$30,000, which was more than we had ever had in the bank.

Once in Dallas, I noticed a piano store and decided to take a look. The owner, Mr. Kahn, showed me around, noting that they specialized in rebuilding Steinways. He had hired a builder from the Steinway factory in New York, and a technician who did the final precision voicing of each instrument—a technician who was awarded as one of the top in the country.

Mr. Kahn showed me some Steinways they were rebuilding for customers, and I was impressed by their attention to detail. It took months to rebuild these classic beauties, from curing and shaping the wood for new sound boards to re-dipping each screw in molten nickel and reinserting them one into their original location. A team of workers stripped, sanded, and reapplied multiple layers of varnish to create that classic, buffed, black-matte finish.

Then Mr. Kahn showed me his latest acquisition—a 1910 Steinway Model B. It was nearly 100 years old by then, but still a beauty that I later found out was due to its being entirely handmade at the Steinway factory in New York City during the “golden age” of the piano—a time when pianos were at the height of their craftsmanship in America.

The “harp” of the piano by itself was gorgeous, cast out of bronze in one entire piece to hold the tension of hundreds of strings. It was ornamented with dozens of decorative details no longer found on new Steinways.

It looked gorgeous, but how would it sound?

I could play it, he said, but it would sound like a hundred year old piano. When they finished with it, however, it would sound even better than a new Model B.

“Better than a new one?” I said.

“Oh, much better,” he said, attributing the difference to the quality of the original materials that were used and the intricate design compared to the way Steinways were being made today.

The piano already looked better than the new one I had seen in the showroom, even in its time-weathered state. And could it really be better than the new one I had seen for \$42,000 back home?

“But how will it sound,” I finally said out loud.

“Exquisite,” he said. “And if for any reason you don’t like the sound, you don’t have to buy it.”

Would I like them to start rebuilding it for me, he asked. They would just need a deposit to begin the work.

It would take several months from start to finish and I could stop by to check on the progress anytime I wanted. Then they would need the final payment when the work was complete.

“How much would it cost?” I asked, preparing for yet another sticker shock.

“30,000,” he said.

The Treasure

\$30,000. It was everything I had. This is where the question of faith came in. Was I going to believe that God had answered my prayer, step out in faith, and commit to buying this piano, having not even having heard how it would sound when it was done?

The easy answer was, “Yes.” It was too remarkable that just six months earlier I had thought it would be impossible to get the piano in front of me in the showroom, yet now I had the cash in hand and the very real possibility of getting an even better one.

Yet it would cost me everything I had.

I thought of Jesus’ parable about the treasure in a field. “The Kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field,” Jesus said. “When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field” (Matthew 13:44).

This verse specifically applied to the kingdom of heaven, but it also applied to my situation. I had sold my home and had the cash, but was this a treasure worth putting everything into? I wasn’t a famous pianist, and I rarely performed in public. I had only started writing a few songs that I only played for myself. I had no way to ever make this money back from

playing the piano. I just wanted something that sounded good when I played for myself.

And for God. He was the primary audience of most of my songs. I played worship music mostly, playing and singing in my quiet times with Him. As I thought about this, I felt I heard God say to me, “Eric, people spend millions playing music that profanes My name. I’ve called you to glorify it. Why would I not want you to have an instrument like this to sing to Me?”

I pictured God having to listen to all kinds of music, at full volume, from all around the world, music that mocked and derided His name, expressing every kind of vulgar thought or deed. And I thought how pleasing it would be for Him to hear a single melody from one piano and one heart praising His name, giving thanks to Him, putting their full faith and trust in Him, no matter how imperfectly.

I thought of King David, before he was a king, when King Saul was looking for someone to play the harp for him in the palace when he was feeling tormented. Saul’s servants told him about David, a shepherd boy who played skillfully on the hills of Bethlehem, so Saul brought David to live in the palace and play for him. The Bible says when David played, relief came to the king (see 1 Samuel 16:14-23).

Perhaps God felt the same when I played, that it brought relief to Him. It certainly brought relief to me. As I pictured David leav-

ing his small-town shepherd fields and moving into the palace, I imagined he probably got a new harp, too.

“Where do you think David got the harp he played for the king?” I felt God asking me.

“From the king, I would imagine,” I said.

“And where are you getting your new piano?” I felt God asking me again.

“From Mr. Kahn,” I said, laughing as I said it.

Then I stopped laughing. What does ‘Kahn’ mean, I wondered?

I asked Mr. Kahn the next time I saw him in the store.

“Kahn?” he said. “It means *king*.”

Standing Alone

By faith, I felt this piano was God's answer to my prayers, the pearl of great price, the treasure hidden in a field. But I also felt it was too big of a decision to make on my own.

I decided to ask Lana and the leaders of the church who had just hired me what they thought.

“\$30,000?” Lana said. “I can think of a lot of things we need that add up to \$30,000.”

While Lana was generally supportive of my steps of faith, this one was extreme, even for her. “Mr. Kahn?” she said. Sounds like “Mr. Con” to me. “How can you know if you can trust him?”

She had a point. I had no way of knowing if I could trust him or not.

The leaders at my church were just as hesitant. They had hired me as a step of faith for themselves, only able to pay me a part-time salary and relying on me to make up the difference. This could put my position with them in jeopardy and seemed like a reckless and frivolous move.

They had a point, too.

Yet I couldn't deny that a major miracle had just taken place. That which had previously seemed impossible was now entirely possible. In my previous steps of faith I had often

been the last one willing to take them, weighing all my options carefully, even when others thought it was quite obvious that God had answered my prayers.

But in this case, I was the one standing alone. Everyone around me was skeptical, even to the end.

I had rarely made a decision to do anything when those praying with me about that decision felt otherwise. And I had never made a decision in which Lana didn't agree with me, or at least agree to trust me with the decision even if she was unsure about it herself. But in this case, every person close to me clearly expressed that they thought I was hearing from myself and not from God.

When I said I felt I needed to go forward anyway, the leaders at my church even said, "It sounds like you think you hear better from God than we do and you think you know how to handle money better than we do."

I thought carefully about what they said, yet somehow I also felt like Joseph in *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream Coat* when he says to the butler and the baker after interpreting their dreams, "Don't rely on all I said I saw. It's just that I have not been wrong before!"

I didn't feel quite that confident, but I felt pretty strongly that this really was God, and that the finances that had come through were already part of the miracle.

I couldn't rely on the faith of others this time. I was going to have to rely on my own. What did I truly believe? Did I believe God had answered my prayers or not?

I did. And by faith, I put a down payment on the piano, and I asked Mr. Kahn to start rebuilding it.

For My King

Three months later, as the technicians at Kahn's were putting the finishing touches on the piano, they showed me a twelve-inch oval decal they were about to affix to the sound-board.

I had never seen a decal like it because Steinway no longer applies it to their new pianos. But in 1910, they applied this decal to every Steinway grand. The decal says in its center "Steinway & Sons, manufacturer by appointment to..." and then it lists twelve kings of twelve countries at the time, encircled by the crests of each of those kingdoms: "Manufacturers by appointment to His Majesty William II, German Emperor and King of Prussia, His Majesty Nicholas II, Czar of Russia, His Majesty Alfonso XIII, King of Spain, His Majesty Franz Joseph I, Emperor of Austria and King of Hungary." On went the list through the kings and queens of Sweden, Great Britain, Italy, Saxony, Norway, and Turkey, ending with "And Other Distinguished Royalties."

As I looked at that list of those twelve kingdoms and their twelve kings and queens, I couldn't help but think that this particular piano had been manufactured by appointment to

the King over them all, “the King of kings and Lord of lords, Jesus Christ.”

I thanked Mr. Kahn for rebuilding it for me and told him why it was so significant that God had brought me to him who’s name he told me, unaware of my prayers, meant *king*. I told him about my conversation with God and how I felt this piano had been given to me by The King, to be played for the King, and to bring joy to The King and all who heard it, including me.

When the piano was completely finished just a few days later, with a decal in place that I had never seen before in the center of the soundboard, I could say it was truly the most beautiful piano I had ever seen, even more beautiful than the brand new Steinway Model B I had seen in the showroom more than a year earlier.

When I sat down to play it, it sounded, well, to use Mr. Kahn’s own word that he promised from the beginning, it sounded exquisite.

I’ve played many Steinways over the years since I got my piano more than twenty years ago. The latest I played was a brand new Steinway Model B just last year at Steinway’s downtown showroom in New York City, which incidentally now sells for \$120,000.

Not one has compared to the one God gave me that day. It’s even better than a new one.

And I still love playing it for my King.

I Love You, Baby!

I was at the copy shop late one night working on the paper for my ministry called The Ranch. I did newsletters and would send them out to those who followed along with the ministry. I was wearing down, feeling all alone at the back of the store and tired from a long day. The store was about to close, and I was discouraged that after all my work, I still wasn't done.

Then, from behind me, I faintly heard singing: *"You're just too good to be true..."*

I turned to look over my shoulder to see who was there. But it was a song on the store's PA system. It was Frankie Valli and The Four Seasons singing this song, but somehow the words were directed straight at me! *"Can't take my eyes off of you..."* I looked again and thought, "God, is that you?!"

Then, as if in answer to my question, the chorus rang out:

"I LOVE YOU BABY!

And if it's quite alright I need you baby,

To warm a lonely night,

Don't ever leave me baby,

Please don't leave me!"

It was God, and He was singing to me! I laughed as I listened to Him sing the rest of the song to me, not sure if I could believe it

was really Him. But then I remembered a verse in the Bible that says, “the Lord your God will rejoice over you with singing” (Zephaniah 3:17). He really was singing over me!

Then He spoke to my heart: “Eric, there’s so much going on in the world that when I see someone following me and doing what I want them to do, it brings a smile to my face. You may feel like what you do doesn’t make any difference, but it does. You may feel all alone, but you’re not. I’m right here with you. I can’t take my eyes off of you. What you’re doing brings me great joy!”

I don’t always choose to do what God wants me to do. But God showed me that night that He rejoices whenever any of us make that choice. My attitude changed for the rest of the night. It put a smile on my face. I got a second wind and thought of the verse, “The joy of the Lord is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10). When we see God rejoicing, it gives us strength. So knowing that He took joy in what I was doing, it gave me strength to go on.

The Bible also says: “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up” (Galatians 6:9).

And just maybe we’ll get to hear God sing over, “I love you, baby!”

Using My Gifts

I was reading Jesus's parable of the talents in Matthew chapter 25. I was intrigued that the master in the story had given different amounts of talents, a type of coin in those days, to three different servants to invest for him as they saw fit, with the amounts determined according to their abilities.

Two of the servants invested their talents and over time doubled the amounts given to them, giving a return back to their master. But one of the servants hid his talent in the ground, later giving it back to his master with no return at all. The master commended the first two and put them in charge of more, saying, "Come and share your master's happiness." But the third he rebuked and let him go, resulting in a fate worse than he could have imagined.

As I read the story, I thought about my own life and how I was using the gifts and talents God had given me. Was I using them well or hiding them in the ground? Sensing this could be important, I decided to ask God.

"Lord," I wrote in my journal, "am I not using the gifts You've given me?"

A little to my surprise, the answer came back, "No." Here I thought I was doing pretty

good. I was working at my job, attending Bible studies, raising my kids, loving my wife.

But I sensed there was more, much more, that God wanted me to do for Him.

“Lord,” I asked, “what do You want me to do?”

He said, “I told them to make a return on what I gave them.”

So I began to take an inventory of the things God had given me. I listed five things and asked God what to do with them.

The gift of faith was at the top of my list, faith to believe that God can do anything, absolutely anything. “What do You want me to do with that, Lord?” I asked.

“Return to Me many faithful men and women.”

Next up was a desire to commune—to communicate—with Him.

“Bring others into My presence with you.”

The third was a desire to read God’s Word, to know His will, and to do it.

“Multiply that among others,” God said.

The fourth was to communicate truth and difficult concepts in a way that’s clear and useful to listeners. God said to do it, to communicate His truths to others in a way that’s clear and useful to them.

And last was a passion for the piano. “What am I to do with that?” I asked.

“Play before millions,” He said. Totally shocked by and disbelieving that last response, I asked, “For what purpose?”

God said, “To bring joy unending.”

I was tracking with God fine up to that last point. But to play the piano before millions? I had hardly ever played—and didn’t want to play—for anyone. I had never written a song, and I truly didn’t think I was very good at playing. I just loved playing the piano, and almost always played it just for myself.

I quickly stopped writing and shut my journal. Clearly, I was not hearing from God.

Just one week later, however, God called me to quit my secular job, to go into full-time ministry, and to begin working for Him. It’s been 25 years since that time, and God has helped me to create a ministry in which I’ve been able to reach tens of thousands of people each day with words of encouragement for their faith. I’ve preached hundreds of messages and written more than two dozen books to help others grow in their faith in Christ.

And, most surprisingly of all, I began playing the piano more and more, writing and even recording my own music. I’ve uploaded it to various websites over the years, but I was really surprised to see one website where my music really took off. It was a new startup company at the time, called Pandora, and my sister and I submitted some music to them and were pleased to learn that it was accepted.

Now, 25 years later, and just a few months ago, I was looking at the total number of streams of my piano music on Pandora. I had not just surpassed 1 million streams, but 2 million.

Or, as God had said: “Millions.”

“For what purpose?” I had asked Him.

His response: “To bring joy unending.”

I am... blown away.

God's Call

Two weeks before God called me into full-time ministry, I was telling a friend I wished I had more free time to do the things I loved most—reading the Bible, praying, and playing the piano. It had been five years since I had taken my three-month sabbatical to do those things so intensely, and I was wishing I could do them more.

As my friend prayed with me about it, she said, “I believe God’s going to free up your time, really soon, so you can do those things.” I appreciated the thought but didn’t think much more about it.

A week later, though, God challenged me through the parable of the talents to consider whether I was using my gifts for Him or keeping them hidden. One week after that, God called me into full-time ministry in a dramatic and unmistakable way.

It started on the morning of Valentine’s Day, February 14th, 1995. I was taking a bath, reading my Bible, and writing in my journal before flying out later that day from Illinois to Texas to pray for a woman who had cancer. A mutual friend of ours had called me a few days earlier to ask if I would come and pray for this woman as the doctors didn’t expect her to live much longer.

When my friend asked me to come, I said I was willing, but asked why he didn't just pray for her since he was there. I didn't feel I had any particular gift for healing, but he thought otherwise. Several years earlier I had prayed for him and his wife to have a child and they did one year later, even though the doctors had declared his wife infertile. My friend said, "I think if you came, something would happen."

He said he'd pay for my flight if I would come, but I would have to come soon as she didn't have much time left. I didn't know what might happen, but I was willing to pray with anyone, anytime, so I said I would come—and this was the day that I was heading down there to pray.

During my quiet time that morning in the tub, I wrote in my journal, "Lord, I dedicate today to you. Use me however you can."

Then I added, "Lord, I would like to see her healed. For Your sake, for her sake, for my sake. Lord, what are you going to do?"

"Heal her," He said.

"How and when?" I asked.

"Through you, tonight."

More than a little bit shocked, I thought, "How can I believe this? Is there a verse to confirm it?"

I then wrote in my journal two verses from the Bible that came to mind: Genesis 2:3 and Exodus 12:2. Just those names and numbers, just like that. I didn't know what they said,

though, so I looked them up. Genesis 2:3 was about the Sabbath day and Exodus 12:2 was about Passover day—neither of which seemed relevant to my situation.

Puzzled, I began to write, “I need more insight...,” but before I could finish asking the question, God spoke, as clear as crystal.

“Like the Passover and the Sabbath were markers of special days, so today marks a special day for you.”

“What will it mark?” I asked.

“The beginning of your ministry,” He said.

I closed my journal, broke down, and cried.

When Following Means Leaving

I cried when God said this day would mark the beginning of my ministry because I had been wanting to do ministry in a fuller way for years. I just didn't know how or when. I knew that I knew that God was speaking to me, saying today would mark the beginning of my ministry, but, still, I wondered how I could possibly believe it.

How could I believe He was going to heal this woman? How could I believe this was the day that would shift the direction of the rest of my life?

I also wondered what kind of healing it might be and if it would be clear that this woman was healed.

"Will I know that she's healed?" I asked.

"You'll know it," He said.

"Will she know that she's healed?" I asked.

"She'll know it," He said.

"Okay, God," I said. "I'm going to trust You."

On the plane to Texas, God continued speaking to me.

"That project you're working on, I want you to give it to Doug," God said.

I had been working on a project for my company for almost two years. We were two months away from launching it publicly, and I was more than a little bit shocked that He wanted me to give it away.

“What would I work on?” I said.

“You don’t need that job,” He said. “I want you to quit—tomorrow.”

Wow! That escalated fast! Maybe God really was serious about this being the beginning of my ministry!

As excited as I was by the thought, I was also petrified. This was no small decision. I was married, had three kids at home, and about \$1,500 in the bank. How could I just quit—tomorrow. At least how could I quit without affecting a whole lot of other things and people.

I decided to call Lana from the phone on the plane to keep her updated on what I felt God was saying. I had already talked to her that morning in person when I was crying in the tub, telling her what God had been saying to me.

Lana had been completely “with me” at that time, realizing that something significant was taking place. She was trusting God with all of this as much as I was. But quitting my job the next day? Would she still be “with me” on that?

I pulled out the phone that was embedded in the seat in front of me on the plane and

called her. I told her what I felt God was asking me to do, to give my project to Doug and to quit my job the next day. Her response stunned me: “Don’t worry about me and don’t worry about the money,” she said.

For my wife to say not to worry about her and not to worry about the money, this had to be God speaking to me! This was completely out of character for Lana, or for any spouse for that matter.

I told her thanks for her support, and that I would have to think about it more later, as my plane was about to land. My friend was picking me up at the airport and we were going out for dinner before heading out to his friend’s house to pray for this woman’s healing.

First things first. Praying for this woman was the most important thing I needed to focus on next.

One Thing

My friend picked me up at the airport and we went out to eat at a local Tex-Mex restaurant. Over chips and salsa, he updated me on his renewed marriage and his new son, answers to prayer which encouraged me that God still does miracles.

As dinner progressed, I shared with him what I felt God was saying to me that day about his friend's healing, about beginning my new ministry, and quitting my job the next day. He was not only a close friend and fellow believer, but also a co-worker at the same company, so he understood the impact all these things would have on my life if this really was God speaking to me.

We were about to find out.

We met his friend and her husband at their home, spending the first hour catching up on her story. She had battled cancer for over twenty years. It had affected everything in her life, from curtailing school activities to framing the way she viewed God.

We shared stories with each other of how God had worked in our lives, as well as ways we had seen and heard how He worked in other people's lives, too, both people living today and people throughout the centuries. We had no doubt that God *could* do these things, but

would He do them in this situation? And if so, why hadn't He done them for her yet?

The lumps of cancer had spread throughout her body, some of which were pressing against her vocal cords, making her voice quiet and strained. We talked about a man in the city where she lived that we both knew who had been suddenly and miraculously healed of a condition that affected his vocal cords. I asked if he might pray for her. She said he had been there a few months earlier.

I mentioned a famous healing evangelist who also lived in her city. I knew of his story from visiting his church, as his wife had been healed of cancer many years ago and was still flourishing.

"Yes," she said, "he and wife were here praying for me two weeks ago."

Wow. Okay. I mentioned one other mutual friend who lived there in town who had seen many miraculous answers to his prayers.

"Yes," she said, "he was here last week praying for me."

What was I doing there, I wondered!

"You must really be at the end of your rope if God sent me to you!" I said. I felt I had nothing to offer that hadn't already been done. But there I was, believing that somehow God was going to heal her, through me, that night.

Hesitatingly, both for her sake and mine, I shared with her all that God had shared with

me earlier in the day—that He wanted to heal her, that she would know she was healed and I would know she was healed, that this day was going to mark the beginning of my ministry, and that He wanted me to quit my job after nine years on the following day.

In the natural, it seemed totally impossible, not only because so many others had prayed for her healing and nothing seemed to have changed, but also because the prestigious hospital where she was being treated had just told her that one of her blood cell counts was the highest they had ever seen. The cancer was running rampant through her body.

I told her I didn't know what to make of all that I felt God was telling me, but I still wanted to share with her what I knew, then pray.

Part of me doubted that anything would happen, but another part of me expected those lumps of cancer to start flying out of her body. I asked if she had anything we could use for communion, as I felt it would be fitting to take it together as we prayed. Her husband brought some juice and bread from the kitchen, and after several hours of talking, we began to pray.

Before we did, though, I asked her a question I often ask before praying with people, even if it seems totally obvious what they want me to pray for. Their answers sometimes surprise me, just as it did that night.

“What would you want me to pray for you if you could ask God for anything?” I said.

“I want to hear God’s voice,” she said. “I want to hear Him speaking to me. I’ve been a Christian for over twenty years and have read the Bible multiple times, but I’ve never heard God speak to me in a personal way. What good would it be if I was healed of cancer but still couldn’t hear His voice?”

Her question broke my heart. Of course I would pray for that. And I did.

I also prayed for her physical healing, but realized that this was secondary to what she really wanted—a closer, deeper, intimate, and personal relationship with God.

It was midnight when we finished praying, and God said I could go home.

“But Lord, I protested, she still has the lumps of cancer.” I could still see them protruding from under her skin. I could still hear them in the rasping of her voice. But there was nothing more I could think of to do or to say or to pray.

My friend and I said our goodbyes. He dropped me off at my aunt and uncle’s house where I would be spending the night. And that’s when my real battle of faith began.

As I lay my head on my pillow, I asked God if this really was the beginning of my ministry and if He really did want me to quit my job the next day.

“God,” I said, “how can I quit my job tomorrow? If I had seen those lumps of cancer fly off her body, I’d quit for sure.”

God said, “Then you’d be walking by sight and not by faith, and I’ve called you to walk by faith.”

Unable to solve the puzzle that was perplexing my mind, I fell asleep.

God's Timing

I woke up the next morning and went into my office building in Texas. Although I was living and working remotely in Illinois, the main office for the department in which I worked was there in Texas, and I still had an office there, too.

It was a miserable day, however, walking around the building, trying to get work done while wrestling with my thoughts and my faith. For all the joy of talking and praying with this woman the night before, it was now becoming overshadowed by the decision I felt God was calling me to make about my job. I had no idea what I would do next if I did quit. I only sensed that quitting was the next step God wanted me to take.

Would I walk by sight or walk by faith? When the end of the workday came, I still felt no closer to a decision. I just couldn't do it. I couldn't quit.

I spent that night at another friend's house, a friend whom God has used to speak into my life like no other. When I told him about my dilemma, he listened, prayed, and shared some verses of Scripture with me about God's healing power and the power of prayer (Luke 9:11 and Luke 11:9). I went to bed still puzzled, but more confident that God could do all I had

asked Him to do and all He was wanting me to do. The next morning, in my quiet time while taking another bath, I confessed my fears to God.

“I’m afraid,” I said.

“I know,” He replied. Then He comforted me with words from Jeremiah 17:7, “But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in Him.”

I kept reading on from there in that passage from Jeremiah 17, reading about the blessings that follow obedience (Jeremiah 17:24-26), and the curses that follow disobedience, such as this: “But if you do not obey Me... then I will kindle an unquenchable fire in the gates of Jerusalem that will consume her fortresses” (Jeremiah 17:27).

It was a strong warning about disobedience, and as I read it, God brought to mind the time when I was trying to decide which day I should start my three-month sabbatical a few years earlier. There was that date I felt God was telling me to start, yet the date that made more logical sense to me was three days later after a holiday weekend.

God then reminded me how that decision had worked out: that because I acted in faith on what He said I should do, and started my sabbatical on the day I felt He wanted me to start, I was able to be with my mom for the last three days of her life. Had I waited until the date I thought was more logical, I would

have had an extra \$1,000. There was no comparison between the two. God's ways are always better than mine.

Thinking about my current situation, that God had called me to quit "tomorrow" and here it was already the day after that, I sensed I knew what God wanted me to do. I just wasn't sure I could do it. I was already a day late in being obedient, though, and I knew I couldn't wait any longer. I had been praying for years that God would increase my faith and to help me step out in faith whenever and however He wanted me to do it, and today I was facing one of those days.

By faith, I knew He wanted me to quit my job, and it couldn't wait even one more day. I finished getting ready for work, my last day on my job.

Elevator Conversation

I went to my office that morning with only one goal in mind: to turn in my badge and my letter of resignation. Because I worked in the computer department, I wasn't able to give two weeks' notice, or any notice for that matter. We had access to too much sensitive data to allow us to linger any length of time if they knew we were leaving. So the protocol was to turn in your badge, pack your things into a box, and be escorted by security on your way out of the building.

I knew my time would be limited once I told anyone I was quitting, so I quickly said some goodbyes to a few of my co-workers then turned in my badge.

As I walked towards the elevator lobby on the fourth floor where my office was located, with my box in my hands and a security guard at my side, one of my co-workers followed me.

"Why are you quitting today?" he asked.

I had decided I wasn't going to make this an evangelistic departure, talking about God, and all that He was doing in my life. I was just trying to get through it as best I could, with a mixture of fear and faith both competing for my attention inside of me.

I tried to brush off his question with a generic answer about it being a good time to

go given all the changes going on in the company. He didn't buy it.

"But why today?" he asked. "Why now?"

He was an Asian man from our Artificial Intelligence group, genuinely kind, but from what I knew of our previous conversations, he was a devout atheist.

I didn't want to answer him, but his voice was somehow pleading for the truth. So I told him.

"To be honest," I said, "God told me to quit yesterday, but I couldn't do it. So I'm quitting today."

He burst into tears, saying, "If God told you to do it, you've gotta do it!"

He went on to tell me that he had recently become a Christian. He was dating a woman who went to a church in town and had unfortunately gotten her pregnant. He started going to church with her, put his faith in Christ, and told me that when their baby would be born in a few months' time, he was going to be baptized, too.

I couldn't believe it! But I couldn't believe what he told me next even more. He asked what I was going to do, and I told him I had no idea.

He said, "Eric, you've got to get online and start telling people about Jesus." What he actually said was, "You've got to get on CompuServe or AOL," that shows how long ago this was, as the internet as we know it today was

still in its infancy. He continued, "You've got to get online and start telling people about Jesus. There are people like me online all hours of the day and night looking for answers, and you've got them!" He even offered to pay for my CompuServe or AOL account.

The door of the elevator opened, I said goodbye, and I walked into it with my box and my escort. I rode down to the lobby and walked out of the building, shaking my head as I walked, wondering if that was really God speaking to me through someone whom I thought, just minutes earlier, had been one of my atheistic friends.

Apparently, it was God speaking, for I've been doing just what he said, sharing with people about Jesus online ever since that day. That was 25 years ago.

A Heart Healed

I flew home to Illinois the next day after I quit my job, unsure what I was supposed to do next. I simply felt good about having been obedient to do what God had wanted me to do.

“Obedience brings blessing,” He said in His Word. “I will bless you, and others, too, through your obedience.” And He has.

The question that was continually on my mind, though, was, “What about the woman I prayed for to be healed?” It had been three days since we prayed, and I wanted to call and talk to her.

I asked God if I could, and He said, “Yes.”

I asked if there was anything I should tell her. He said to tell her that He loved her and that He came on Valentine’s Day to heal her heart.

I picked up the phone and called.

“How are you doing?” I asked.

“Eric,” she said, “I’m sicker than I’ve ever been in my life.” Her voice was raspy and barely above a whisper. My heart sank.

She continued, “But, Eric, for the first time in my life, I believe I’ve been healed! I’ve been afraid to tell any of my friends because I’ve been so sick. But you wouldn’t believe what happened last night.”

She went on to tell me that she had gone to a renewal conference and the speaker was talking about the love of God—how wide and long and high and deep it was.

“Eric,” she said, “for the first time in my life I heard God speak to me, personally, telling me how much He loved me.”

She cried as she talked.

I said, “That’s exactly what we prayed for, that you would hear God speak to you personally!” I told her what I felt God had told me to tell her just before I called, that He loved her and that He came to heal her heart on Valentine’s Day.

I told her about quitting my job, that God wanted me to walk by faith, not sight, and that I believed she would be healed. “And I believe God has healed you,” I said. “He’s healed your heart—and there’s no greater healing than that.”

“I believe that, too, Eric,” she said.

I said, “And that’s exactly what God said would happen, that you would know that you had been healed, and I would know that you had been healed. And we both know it!”

I told her I would keep praying for her physical healing, but that the greater healing had already taken place—and in the way that was exactly what she had asked for—to hear God’s voice speaking to her personally.”

I hung up the phone, my heart filled with joy—the joy that comes from answered prayer.

Six weeks later, she passed from this life to the next. Now she sees God face to face and hears His voice, every day. And she is... completely healed.

Called to Israel

Six days after I quit my job, I found myself on a plane to Israel. I didn't know why. I had never wanted to go to Israel, had never considered going to Israel, and had never even thought about going to Israel. But for some reason, when I quit my job, I began sensing God wanted me to go.

I saw "Israel" everywhere I looked in the Bible, of course, but for some reason the word was now leaping off the pages.

Three days after I quit my job, I was lying down on a couch at a guest house in northern Illinois where my family and I were staying on a ski trip with another family from church. We had planned and paid for the trip before I quit, or I probably wouldn't have gone. I stayed back at the guest house that afternoon while everyone else went out skiing, partly because I wanted some time alone to process all that had taken place over the previous few days, and partly because I didn't want to get hurt skiing, as I suddenly had no health insurance!

As I was lying there on the couch writing in my journal and reading my Bible, I sensed God again calling me to go to Israel. I asked Him what to do about it.

“Go there,” He said. “See it. Live it. Love it. Experience it. There you will find My presence.”

“What should I see?” I asked.

“Where My Son was crucified and where My temple will be rebuilt,” He said.

That was specific!

“Is this really you?” I asked. “I just don’t know if you’re talking to me. At all. Is this all real?”

I asked God to set my eyes on a verse in the Bible. I opened it up and sensed God saying to look at the third line down. It seemed crazy, but God had been speaking so specifically, so I looked. It said, “You know my thoughts and when I’m lying down.”

There I was, lying down on the couch. It continued, talking about how God knows every detail about us, our anxious thoughts, all our ways, and how He is with us always, wherever we go.

Somehow, in that moment, I knew that God really was right there with me, that He really was speaking to me, and that He really did want me to go to Israel. But how would I get there? I didn’t even know what city I could fly in to or how much it would cost. I only had \$1,500 in the bank, no job, and no idea what I was going to do next. Except this: “Go to Israel.”

I decided to call a travel agent right then to see how I would get to Israel, in case I did de-

cide to go. There was no Google or Travelocity at the time where I could look it up.

I asked the woman who answered my call how I would get to Israel from Chicago. She said I could fly from O'Hare Airport in Chicago to Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv.

"How much would it cost?" I asked.

Remember, I only had \$1,500 in the bank.

"\$1,498," she said. Two thoughts went through my head at the same time. One was mine and the other was God's.

Mine said, "I don't have enough!"

God's said: "You have just enough!"

Now the question came of faith. Would I believe this really was God speaking to me and go? Or would I stay home in fear and well-reasoned doubt?

It was too big of a decision to make on my own, so I reached out for help.

Ask for Muhammad

I talked to Lana about my thoughts of going to Israel, and then to my pastor and my men's group at church. Thinking they would all think I was crazy, I decided to let them make the decision whether I should go or not. I felt I was too much in the midst of the whirlwind to trust myself.

My pastor said, "Wow, you're trusting us with this decision? Maybe I'd better stay home from the basketball game tonight and really pray about this!" He went to the game, anyway, but I appreciated the sentiment, and he really did spend extra time praying about it.

To my complete surprise, he and all the other men in my group thought this really could be God speaking to me. They encouraged me to follow what I felt God was calling me to do. So with their affirmation, I decided to go. But God had one more thing He wanted to say to me.

During my quiet time in the church one morning, he said, "Open your Bible."

I did.

I began reading the words in front of me from Ezekiel chapter 8, verses 1-3. They leapt off the page.

Ezekiel described seeing a vision of what looked like a man, glowing like fire, who "...

stretched out what looked like a hand and took me by the hair of my head. The Spirit lifted me up between heaven and earth and in visions of God, he took me to Jerusalem, to the entrance of the North Gate of the inner court... and there before me was the glory of the God of Israel.”

I said to God, “Wow, Lord, it was like Ezekiel was flying through the sky, between heaven and earth, just like I’ll be doing, but in a plane. And You took him to the North Gate of the inner court of the temple and revealed Yourself to him there. Okay, to the North Gate of the Temple Mount—that’s where I’ll go.”

I told Lana if anyone is looking for me, I’d be at the North Gate.

With my marching orders in place, I used the last of my money and bought a plane ticket to Tel Aviv. I didn’t know where I would stay, how long I would stay, or what I would do there, except to go to the two places I felt God wanted me to go: the place where Jesus died and the North Gate of the Temple Mount.

On the morning of my flight, a man in my men’s group asked if I had a place to stay when I got there. I didn’t.

He said the owner of the grocery store in our small town had relatives in Israel. Maybe I could stay with them. We drove to the store and told him where I was going. He was delighted. He called his brother, talked for a few

minutes in Arabic, then told me it was all set. They would send someone to pick me up at the airport in Tel Aviv.

I thanked him and asked if I could get his brother's name and address. I had traveled enough to know that international connections weren't always smooth, and it's good to have a backup plan.

He said they didn't have addresses on the West Bank where they lived. This was a time during a lot of uprising and resettlement, so they didn't have an address.

"Just ask for Muhammad in the city of El Jib," he said.

Ask for Muhammad. In El Jib. How many could there be?

With that, I stopped by my house to pick up my bags, drove to the airport, and boarded my plane to Israel.

A Man of Peace

Just before I left for Israel, I asked God about staying with this family there.

“God, is this really what You want me to do? Or should I book a hotel?”

I didn’t have any extra money for a hotel, but I was nervous.

I felt like opening my Bible. The first words I read were from Luke 10:5-7, 9: “When you enter a house, say, ‘Peace to this house.’ If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you. Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house... Heal the sick who are there and tell them, ‘The Kingdom of God is near you.’”

“Okay, Lord,” I said. “I’ll do it.”

My fears about the trip were not just about where I would stay, but about what would happen when God actually showed up and revealed Himself to me. Sometimes in the Bible, He came in a quiet whisper (see 1 Kings 19:11-13), but other times, it was with fire and smoke and thunderous explosions. Tensions were high once again in Israel, as they often are, as peace talks were on the brink of falling apart. A suicide bombing had occurred there the week before. And now, I wasn’t going to be

staying in the tourist areas that were well-protected, but in the West Bank with a Muslim family where violence was constant.

My fears were heightened when I changed planes in Frankfurt, Germany. It was the middle of the night, and I walked to the farthest end of the airport where my plane to Israel was waiting. A dozen Israeli armed guards were standing in a circle around it, and as I walked down the corner towards it, another armed guard was stationed directly in front of me behind a bulletproof glass. There was only one small hole in the glass, behind which was the front tip of his automated rifle pointing straight at me.

All alone in the middle of the night, I walked down the narrow corridor towards the guard. A song from *VeggieTales* wafted through my mind. I started singing along with it under my breath: "God is bigger than the boogie man. He's bigger than Godzilla or the monsters on TV..."

Between that song and a verse from Luke 10:19, which says, "I have given you authority... to overcome all the power of the enemy [Satan]; nothing will harm you," I was finally able to board my plane and make it to Tel Aviv.

Instead of Muhammed meeting me at the airport, it was a cousin of the grocery store owner's. He said he would take me to their house, as the brother feared he might not make it through all the security checkpoints to

and from the airport. Fear rose once again within me but I didn't really have any other option except to possibly turn around and go home. I would have liked to have run away, like Jonah running away from his calling. But as much as I wanted to run away, I had come to far. I knew that running towards God meant going with this man. So I went.

When we arrived at the house where I was to stay, an elderly man was standing outside waiting to greet us, dressed in full Muslim garb from head to toe. He was, I was told, the father of the two brothers and the uncle of my driver... and also the owner of this house.

I remembered God's words to me for when I arrived. The Bible had said, "Say, 'Peace to this house...'" I also knew from my previous trips to other Arabic countries that the customary Arabic greeting is, "As-Salaam-Alaikum," meaning, "Peace be with you." And the customary response is, "Wa-Alaikum-Salaam," meaning, "And peace be with you."

So I said to the man, almost as much a question as a greeting, "As-Salaam-Alaikum?"

He looked at me and replied, "Wa-Alaikum-Salaam."

I breathed a thankful sigh of relief and told myself, "I'm staying right here. I'm not moving from house to house. I'll eat whatever they put before me, I'll pray for the sick, and I'll proclaim the kingdom of God is near."

I had found a man of peace.

Wait for the Lord

I wondered if I was going crazy—quitting my job, going to Israel less than a week later, and spending the last of our savings to do it. But Lana encouraged me with a letter she wrote that I found tucked in my suitcase when I arrived in Israel.

“You’re the sanest man I know,” she said.

“Oh, God!” I thought. “Thank you for her strong support!” Her letter, plus my gracious Muslim hosts, helped to ease the tension I felt. In fact, my hosts treated me like a king, giving up their master bedroom on the second floor of their cinder-block house, while they and their two other adults and thirteen children and grandchildren stayed in the other two bedrooms. They fed me royally, and I ate everything put before me, never once feeling sick from some of the most unusual foods that I had ever eaten. Sometimes when I travel, I get sick no matter what food I eat. But not this time. God had kept His promise from His word on that, too, to eat “whatever they put before me.”

Muhammad’s wife cared for me especially, worrying for me when I took the bus into the city each day to see the sites, as I was taking a local bus filled predominantly with West Bank Muslims, and having to pass through several

security checkpoints where guards boarded the bus each time to check our papers and my passport. I definitely stood out from the crowd.

I headed for the Temple Mount the first day, as it was one of the two places I felt God wanted me to go, but I was blocked from entering at every gate I tried. Only Muslims were allowed to go in, I was told, as entry was controlled by Muslims because it's now a Muslim holy site. The gold-topped Dome of the Rock is built over "the rock" where Abraham was going to sacrifice Isaac, but God gave him a ram to sacrifice at the last moment instead. The site was also the same site David chose for Solomon to build the Temple, which Solomon did, and which Jesus visited even when He was a young boy.

But because the site was now controlled by Muslims, who also trace their lineage back to Abraham, and because this was the final week of Ramadan, a Muslim holy month, tensions were extra high and non-Muslims were restricted from entering the area.

I tried for two days to enter through various gates, as there are twelve all around the mount, but was never allowed. So I visited other sites like the Mount of Olives, the Garden of Gethsemane, and the Pools of Bethesda.

On the third day, I decided to change course. The cousin who had picked me up at

the airport now drove me into the city and took me directly to the second of the two spots where I felt God wanted me to go, the place where Jesus died. That place has been marked since the 4th century by a church called the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

As I entered the church, I ascended the narrow stairs on the right to an upper tier where a life-size, golden cross marks the spot that has been revered for twenty centuries as the place where Jesus died. Although I was surrounded by noisy tourists and somewhat gaudy decorations adorning that small room, I was nevertheless overcome with emotion by what happened there all those years ago. I fell to my knees, less by choice than by sheer emotion, and bent down to the floor in tears.

Jesus had died for me there, paying the price for the sins I had committed. He was innocent Himself, but He loved me so much that He stepped in to take the penalty in my place. I don't know how long I stayed there in that position on the floor crying, but when I finally stood back up, I told my Muslim host why I was so overcome, that Jesus had died for me there, doing what no other man could have ever done, He paid the price for my sins so I could be free.

I had finally seen at least one of the two sites God had wanted me to see, and it was so powerful. That night I laid in bed wondering if or how I would ever see the other one.

I read this verse that night in my Bible, from Psalm 27 in the Amplified Version, which talks about seeking God's face in His temple. It says:

“Wait and hope for and expect the Lord; be brave and of good courage and let your heart be and enduring. Yes, wait for and hope for and expect the Lord.”

So I did.

The Dome of the Rock

On my fifth day in the city, I ran into a shopkeeper who told me how I could get onto the Temple Court! If I went to a particular gate before 9 a.m., I could show my passport to the guard there, and he could let me in. It was critical I get there by 9, he said, as they blocked access after that point.

It was approaching 9 when he told me, so I took off running through the streets of old Jerusalem in the direction he had said. I reached the gate with only a few minutes to spare, showed the guard my passport, and was finally permitted in just before they closed the gate behind me.

Wow! The sun was so bright that morning, and the wide open space of the Temple Mount was so wide—nearly one square mile of land—and perhaps the most valuable piece of property in the entire world. It's considered one of the most holy sites in the world to Jews, Christians and Muslims.

But to me on that day, it was invaluable because it was the place where God had said He would reveal Himself to me—and I was finally there. Where was I to go, now that I was there, and how would He reveal Himself to me? I began looking around, starting at the Al-Aqsa Mosque at the far end and working my way

back towards the middle where the brilliant, golden Dome of the Rock was shining. But when I got to the dome and tried to enter it, I was told I had to leave my camera, shoes, and backpack outside. I didn't want to leave them unattended, so I found a tourist standing by a pile of similar items, and I asked her if I could leave my things with her. She said she'd be glad to watch them, as she was watching those things for the others in her tour group, so I left them there and entered the dome.

I walked in, unable to believe I was actually there on the Temple Mount. The place where I was now standing was where Solomon built his famous Temple, where the Lord dwelt among His people in the Holy of Holies, and where Abraham's faith was tested—and proven true. The "Rock" inside the dome was massive, with the exposed portion being about 40 feet in diameter. It was the top of this hill called Mount Moriah back in the days of Abraham.

I walked around to the left of the rock, trying to try to take it all in. A man was standing on the short base of one of the eight pillars surrounding the rock to get a better look, which I thought was a good idea. When he stepped down, I stood where he had been standing to see the rock from a little higher up. Like many things in Israel, it's not the rocks or the stones themselves that are impressive, but what took place at them so many years ago.

Satisfied that I had taken it all in, I exited the dome and returned to the pile of valuables and retrieved my things. The woman who was watching them for me started asking me questions—where I was from, what I was doing there, what church I attended back home. She seemed very interested, but I really didn't want to chit-chat! I was in kind of a hurry, still waiting for God to show up and reveal Himself to me before I had to leave the Temple Mount!

But she kept asking questions. I decided to tell her a quick version of my story, how I had quit my job after praying for a woman to be healed, how I had come to Israel at God's request, and how I had been trying unsuccessfully until that day to get onto the Temple Mount.

She said her husband would be fascinated by my story. "He's a pastor," she said, "and he's still inside the dome. He'll be out in just a few minutes, if you could wait to tell him your story, too."

Not wanting to be impolite, but also not knowing where God wanted me to go next, I told her I'd stay and talk to her husband. I was more than a little impatient, though, as I was waiting for God to show up!

I had no idea He was going to show up through this couple from America.

The North Gate

Before I share what happened next, I have to back up a day, to the day before I finally made it to the Temple Mount. I had stumbled upon a little sign pointing to the “Gihon Spring.” I knew from my Bible reading that this was a spring of water that King David talked about back in his day that provided water for all of Jerusalem. I followed the arrow down a very small path on an unmarked hill to a small trickle of water emerging from a cave.

No one else was there on the hill with me except a few local kids playing near the spring. I sat down on the side of the path and began reading more about this spring and about King David’s life. One thing that struck me was that David had been anointed with oil for the work ahead of him by God’s prophet, Samuel. I thought it would be great if God could send someone to anoint me with oil for the work ahead of me, too. But where would I find someone to anoint me with oil? I didn’t know anyone in all of Israel, let alone anyone there who could or would anoint me with oil.

But just one day later, when this woman talking to me on the Temple Mount said that her husband was a pastor, my heart leapt a little. Maybe he could or would anoint me with

oil! But more likely he'd probably just think I was crazy.

When he came out of the dome, my heart leapt a little more. It was actually the very man I had seen inside the Dome of the Rock, standing on the base of the pillar to get a better look. It was the same man who stepped down and I stepped up to take his place.

My heart leapt even more when, after I told him the story I had told his wife about why I was there and how it all started when I prayed for a woman to be healed, he asked me, "When you pray for people, do you ever anoint them with oil?"

I said I did, and he said he did, too! I couldn't believe it! I hadn't told him anything about wanting to be anointed with oil myself for the task ahead of me. He's the one who brought it up! Had God really provided someone to anoint me with oil?

I asked him if he happened to have any oil with him, and if he did, would be willing to anoint me with oil for the ministry ahead of me, too.

He said he didn't have any oil, but that he'd be glad to do it. "How about walking with us as we continue on our tour, and when we get our next break, we can get some oil and pray for you?"

I agreed, and as his tour regrouped, I walked with them as they began to walk past an ancient archway just to the right of where

we were standing. I wouldn't have noticed it as anything special, except that as we walked passed, the tour guide casually mentioned that that gate was, in ancient days, the North Gate of the inner court of the temple—the very same gate God had told me to visit when I went to Israel, saying He would reveal Himself to me there!

My heart was no longer just leaping. It was about to burst within me. God was orchestrating each of my steps, as I was taking them.

Anointed at the Foot of the Cross

As we walked through the streets, I learned we were walking on the Via Dolorosa, “the way of the cross.” It’s the path Jesus took on His way from the Temple where He was sentenced to death to Golgotha, “the place of the skull,” where He was crucified. Our tour group followed the same path and ended up at the same spot as Jesus, now marked by the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

The tour group took a break for lunch when we arrived there, so this pastor and his wife and I decided to take that time to pray together. I found a shop outside the church that was selling anointing oil from the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, so I bought a small bottle and brought it inside with me. But where to pray? We walked up the narrow stairs to the golden cross that I had seen before which marked the spot where Jesus was crucified. But the cross was surrounded by tourists.

About twenty feet away, however, was a small set of stairs with two pieces of construction wood nailed together and laying at an angle across the steps. They formed a cross, looking much more like the type of cross on which Jesus would have been crucified than the

golden one that was surrounded by tourists. The pastor and I looked at each other and we both said, “What about here?”

It was perfect.

I knelt down at the steps and asked if he could read something from the Bible. He opened to Zechariah 12-14 about the Lord gathering His people together in Jerusalem and making His name known to people from all over the earth.

I had told the pastor I was a little afraid of what might happen when God did show up, as it was often loud and boisterous with fire and clouds of smoke. So he and I were both amazed that right when he started praying, the tour group next to us started singing a hymn, and down below us, some priests started chanting and carrying smoking incense that wafted up to where we were praying. The sights and the sounds and the noises were already quite chaotic, when right in the middle of our prayer, about thirty feet away from us, a man started whacking on a long wooden board with another wooden mallet with all his might, over and over again: “Bang, bang, bang, bang!” It turns out that every day at 1 pm, someone whacks this board in honor of a time, centuries ago, when they weren’t allowed to ring church bells anywhere in Jerusalem. So they whacked on a board to call people to worship, and they still do this to this day.

My new pastor friend was anointing me with oil on my forehead, there at the foot of this wooden cross, ordaining me for the work ahead that God had called me to do: to take the gospel to all the nations and bring as many as possible back into the New Jerusalem, God's heavenly home. I wept in holy tears that fell on the steps in front of me.

My new friend said afterward that when he heard that man whacking on the board with all his might, he said to himself, "That's God speaking to this boy!"

And I knew it was.

That night, as I lay in my bed thinking about all that had happened that day, I asked God, "Was that that? Was that what I came here for?"

God said, "Yes."

I said, "What was it?"

God said, "You're anointed, at the foot of the cross, in the City of David, my beloved city where I will again reign and gather my people and pour out a River of Life." God said I would have other ordination ceremonies in my life, but this one was from Him.

I couldn't believe how God had orchestrated the events of that day, of that entire trip, to bring me to those two places He said He wanted me to go beforehand, walking me from the North Gate of the Temple where I met this couple, to the place where Jesus died, follow-

ing the Via Dolorosa, the way of the cross, to get there.

Joppa Again

“Can I go home now?” I asked God.

“Whenever you’re ready,” He said.

I decided to stay a few more days to see a few more sites, then ten days after I had boarded the plane to come, I took a taxi to the airport in Tel Aviv to go home.

As we neared the airport, I asked the driver if we could stop by the Mediterranean Sea for a few minutes, as I wanted to touch the water of that famous sea.

The place where we stopped was the oldest portion of the city, the ancient city of Joppa where Jonah had boarded a ship to run away from God. I thanked God that He had given me the courage to keep running toward Him instead of away, to seek Him with all my heart, and to wait and hope for and expect Him to show up—because He did.

The Faith of a Child

I wondered how quitting my job to go into ministry might affect my family, but I never expected it to have such immediate results.

Five days after I quit, and the day before I left for Israel, I woke up early in the morning to go to our church to pray and play the piano. Just before I left the house, my oldest daughter, Karis, who had turned four the month before, called to me, crying. She wanted to give me a hug and a kiss and tell me she loved me. I told her God would always watch out for her even if I were gone.

I don't remember how we got on the topic of heaven, but she asked about it, and I asked if she wanted to go there. She said yes, and I asked if she wanted to believe in Jesus. She said yes. She wondered if God sleeps. I said no, He never slumbers or sleeps, but He watches over His people, and He watches over her, all the time. She wondered if angels sleep. I said I didn't know.

I asked if she wanted to follow Jesus, and she did. She asked if we could pray, so I said, "Okay, let's do the echo prayer."

She said after me, "Dear Lord, I love you. I love Jesus. I believe in Jesus. Please take me to heaven. Fill me with Your Holy Spirit. Teach

me how to live and follow you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen."

Then she was all smiles, and we woke up Lana to tell her. She was so happy.

Part of me wondered how a child could believe, but part of me knew that the faith of a child is all it takes for all of us. "Believe on Me and you will be saved," Jesus said.

"Is that is?" I asked God. "Is she saved?"

"Yes, Eric," He said. "It's by grace, through faith. I've poured out my grace on her so she can pour it out on others. You have asked for four years that I would reveal Myself to your children at a young age."

All I could do was to praise God over and over. I had quit my job just five days earlier, and two days before that God told me this was to be the beginning of my ministry. Here I was, just one week later now, praying with my first person to believe in Christ.

She's 29 years old now and still following Him, and in ministry herself, pouring out God's grace on others. I guess it's no accident that God led us to name her Karis, which means *grace* in Greek.

And I guess it was no accident that God had just led me to into full-time ministry, too.

Not a Soul!

I wish I could tell stories of hundreds of people I've prayed with who put their faith in Christ for the very first time like other evangelists that I know. But God seems to use me in a different way, building faith in those who need it, wherever they may be on their faith-journey timeline.

I usually give an invitation to follow Christ whenever I speak publicly, even though I can only remember one time when someone has stood up or raised a hand or come forward for a first-time decision—and that time I think the woman misunderstood my invitation when I asked people to stand up. She told me afterward she wondered why everyone else hadn't stood up with her, too! Still, I continue to give an invitation because I want people to know there's a choice they have to make to follow Christ or not, whether they make it that day or some other day down the road.

This has become a bit of a running joke between God and me, though. As much as I wish I could preach in front of stadiums full of people and see hundreds or thousands stream forward to put their faith in Christ for the very first time, I'm usually still standing all alone at the front, all by myself, while the music plays until I finally sit down. Why, I wonder,

doesn't God let me see even one person come to Christ at the end of my public talks? I don't fully know.

An older pastor once asked a discouraged young pastor if he expected someone to accept every time he preached.

The young man looked down, embarrassed, and said, "No, I guess not."

The older pastor said, "That's your problem!"

When I heard that story, I thought it might be my problem, too. After all, Billy Graham tells in his autobiography that he's never given an invitation without someone coming forward to accept Christ.

So I changed my attitude from then on to always believe that someone would come forward. I've taken half a dozen classes on evangelism to improve my invitation. I've memorized verses and illustrations to share the good news with people as clearly as possible. Still, to this day, whenever I've given a message and at the end, given an invitation, no one stands up or raises their hand or comes forward for a first-time decision for Christ!

I've not saying I'm a failure at preaching, as people frequently tell me how touched they are by God through my messages. I often see many people wiping away tears from their eyes as something I say touches them or stirs their faith inside them in a life-changing way. But as far as seeing someone put their faith in Christ

for the very first time after hearing me speak publicly, I've struck out every time. This makes me both laugh and cry, because deep in my heart, I want nothing more than to see people find Christ for the first time as I found Him, because He so changed the trajectory of my life, both in this life and in the life to come. I still preach and still give an invitation nearly every time, believing that someone's going to come forward. And I always have an inner smile for God when they don't, as if He isn't allowing this to happen for some reason, maybe to keep me humble or to see if I'll still be faithful no matter what the response. If those are the reasons, they're working, on both counts!

Privately, however, when I talk and pray with people one-on-one, it's a different story, like when I prayed with my daughter, Karis, to put her faith in Christ when she was young. Another time happened almost by accident, as I was sharing with a reporter about Christ more out of fear than by faith.

Not A Reporter!

One of those life-changing, one-on-one conversations I've had with others took place on a seminary campus, where my goal wasn't to evangelize at all.

I had been invited by a friend to go with him to a conference for people struggling with various personal issues. I had dealt with some of these same issues myself and had thankfully been set free, when I put my faith in Christ. I told my friend I would go with him so he wouldn't have to attend alone. I also thought it would be helpful for me as I wanted to learn whatever I could to prevent being blindsided by any issue that might possibly arise down the road.

I was actually scheduled to speak at another conference that same week in Washington DC for work, an event where the Vice President of the United States was also going to be speaking. I was honored to be invited, and it was a real dilemma for me to decide whether to go speak in Washington DC or to go to this conference where it was going to be a bit embarrassing to even show up there. But I felt God wanted me to go with my friend, so I cancelled my trip to DC and went to this other conference instead.

My biggest fear in going with him was that anyone who saw me would know why I was there, as nearly everyone there was struggling or had struggled in these same areas at some point in their lives. But I went, and I was glad I did, as I learned a lot and was invited back to speak at several of their conferences in future years. But for that first time, I had a good deal of fear, especially when, on afternoon, a man approached me to ask what was going on at the conference.

As I was starting to tell him, I thought to ask him why he was there. "I'm a reporter," he said.

"Oh, God," I thought. "Not a reporter!" My worst fears were coming true. I could imagine my name in the headlines the next day, telling how I had struggled with some of these same issues myself. I decided to go ahead and answer his questions anyway as best I could. If it made me look bad, so be it, as long as it might possibly make Christ look good. I also decided to pair nearly everything I said with a verse from Scripture. So I would say something, then I would quote something from Scripture, then I would say something else, and I would quote something that went with it from Scripture. That way, if the reporter included something I said in his report, there was a 50-50 chance he would also be quoting something from the Bible, too.

Our conversation went deeper and deeper as we walked and talked all around campus for a good two, then three hours. When we finished talking, I invited him to attend a worship service with me that night at the chapel on campus, which he did.

I was still nervous about everything I had said to him, and he got more than an earful of Scripture, too. But somehow, it opened his heart to the good news of Christ, and that night, at the worship service, he committed his life to Christ.

He didn't tell me this right away. He called me several weeks later, though, to share his joy with me. He had found a local church to attend, had started going to it, and eventually quit his secular reporting job and went into full-time ministry at that church. He continued on in ministry until he retired, more than 25 years later.

He said that he came to that conference as a last ditch effort to find some hope, and he found it—in Christ. As much as I wish I could preach in stadiums and see thousands of people come forward and put their faith in Christ, I trust that God knows what He's doing. I trust He's put me right where He wants me, and He'll keep using me whenever I listen to Him and obey. Even when I'm scared to death to talk to people that He puts on my path.

It's true that "to the world you may be just one person. But to one person, you can be the

world.” I can only wonder how many thousands of people have been touched by this one man’s ministry over those 25 years, and still. If God wants to keep my ministry low key and under the radar and still allow me to reach thousands for Him in some other way, hallelujah! I’m glad to let him do it.

Skinny Dipping in the River of Life

Speaking of having a laugh with God, I was at my church in our small town one morning reading my Bible in the sanctuary. I was all alone in the building, and it was raining outside.

As I read about the River of Life in Ezekiel chapter 47, and how an angel in a vision led Ezekiel into the river, I was intrigued. The angel led Ezekiel into water that was ankle deep, then up to his knees, then up to his waist, and then deep enough in which he could swim. The river flowed east from Jerusalem, then into the Dead Sea where everything it touched sprang back to life.

I wanted to be in that river! I felt like I barely had my toes in it, and I wanted to be fully engulfed in it! I didn't want to just dabble in the things of God anymore—I wanted to do everything He possibly had in mind for me. I said to God that morning that I'd like to step deeper into His river. The rain outside suddenly built in intensity, pelting the roof loudly.

I felt God say, "You want to be in the river? Go outside!"

I thought, "I can't do that! I'd get soaked."

“Exactly!” God said. I wanted to get in the River of Life, but I didn’t want to get wet. And that was the problem! If I wanted to get in the river, I’d have to get wet. It made me think again: Do I really want to get in God’s river or not?

When I thought about the benefits of how that river brought life to everything it touched, I decided to do it. I was going to step outside and step into the rain. At the same time, I also thought about how I wanted to come back in to the sanctuary for a while afterward and spend some more time with God, so I didn’t want to get too wet if I could help it.

I thought it would be better if I took off my shirt so it would be dry when I came back in. Easy enough.

And my shoes.

And my socks, too, I suppose.

And really, the church was out on the edge of town with only a cornfield behind it where I had parked my car. It was very early in the morning, and if I were to go outside the back door where my car was parked, I could probably just strip down to my underwear and keep most everything else dry.

That’s what I’ll do, I thought. So I did.

I opened the door and looked around to make sure no one else was around, then I stepped outside in the rain. I looked up towards the sky and raised my hands to heaven,

saying, “Thank you, Jesus, for Your River of Life! I want to be fully immersed in it!”

But it wasn’t exactly a gentle rain. It more like little water pellets hitting my face and body. Yet I felt good and brave for doing something I felt God wanted me to do.

After several minutes of standing there in God’s presence and praising Him for this tangible expression of my faith, I was good.

I turned around and took hold of the door handle to go back inside. It wouldn’t budge! The door had automatically locked behind me—and my keys to the building were in the pocket of my pants... inside.

I panicked.

The rain was still pelting my whole body. My car was nearby... but my car keys were with my church keys back inside in the pocket of my pants. And my phone. I couldn’t even call anyone for help.

“Oh, God! What am I going to do!?!?”

It was about a mile back to my house, which wasn’t too far, but I couldn’t walk all the way back there through the city streets in my underwear! There was one house nearby and a friend lived there. But my friend was the principal at school who had four daughters. I couldn’t stand just at their door, knocking in my underwear, and have one of his girls answer the door! And if I waited till they went to school, my friend would be gone, too, and only

his wife would be home. I couldn't have her answer the door either!

The only thing left I could think to do was to walk around the outside of the church, try all the other doors, and see if any of them just happened to be unlocked. It wasn't likely, and someone might still see me as I walked around the front, but it was the only option I had left. So I walked around to the side of the building, tried the next door, and to my shock—and with my incredible gratitude—someone had left it unlocked!

“Oh, God, thank You!!!”

I went back inside, dried off with some paper towels from the bathroom, and put on my dry clothes.

I went back into the sanctuary and sat down with my Bible and journal and began to laugh out loud with God.

I wrote: “You knew I'd lock myself out when I decided to go outside, didn't you?”

Then I wrote down what I felt God was saying. It was a smiley face emoji.

“I didn't know You used smiley faces!” I said.

“I use them all the time!” He replied.

He was definitely laughing, laughing *with* me. And his smile was grand.

I had wanted so much to get into God's river, but I didn't want to get too wet. I wanted to stay in control. I wanted to do it on my own

terms, staying as dry and as comfortable as possible.

God showed me that day how that would turn out!

I've thought of this often since.

"I'll do what You say," I'll think to myself, "but I'll do it this way," thinking I'm being so smart. Only to find myself worse off than if I had just done in simple obedience what God had said to do.

God and I had a good laugh that day. And I learned a good lesson, too.

Baptized

Sometime after I put my faith in Christ, a friend asked me if I had been baptized since I had done that. I hadn't because I was already been baptized at age 13 as part of a confirmation class for my church. At that time I still had questions about Jesus and what I really believed, but the people around me encouraged me to go ahead and get baptized anyway, so I did.

Now that I really did believe, however, my friend felt I should be baptized again—or really be baptized for the first time as a believing adult. As the Bible says, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

I had been baptized and then repented, but somehow my friend felt it was important for me to do it in order, to repent and then be baptized. Although I wasn't sure that it mattered, I was willing to pray about it.

I began reading other scriptures about baptism, and it seemed that the order did matter—or at least it was consistent with what I read in the Bible. Repent and be baptized.

I decided to do it, so I talked to my pastor. I was stopped from going forward, though, as

my pastor said since I had already been baptized in that denomination, he couldn't officially baptize me again. Theologically, he said, one baptism was sufficient. Another was redundant. I could see his point, and I had wondered the same, so I went home feeling like I had at least done what I could.

But the thought wouldn't leave me. "Repent and be baptized..." Those words played over and over again in my mind, repeating the words of Peter from the Bible. I had repented but not been baptized as a believer.

One day I was reading about spiritual gifts in the Bible and how God, through His Holy Spirit, wanted to give us gifts to better equip us for works of ministry. I was really drawn towards some of the gifts, like the gift of healing. How wonderful would that be, I thought, to be able to pray for someone and help bring about their healing? I asked God about it, if I might have some of those gifts.

I felt He said, "Have you done what I've already asked you to do?" I knew He meant baptism. He wasn't speaking out of disappointment or anger, but out of love. He wanted more for me, but I felt that somehow He couldn't release more to me until I had been obedient to do what I already knew I needed to do.

I went back to my pastor and explained my situation. He said he understood and agreed to

baptize me, unofficially as far as the church was concerned, at home in his pool.

“Even though only one baptism is necessary,” he said, “I’ve found that being baptized as a believing adult is much more meaningful to the person being baptized.”

I invited Lana and a friend and my cousin and was baptized in my pastor’s pool.

It felt good, really good, to have been obedient to this simple request of Christ. I didn’t feel anything tangibly different that day having been baptized, just thankful that I had done it. The following day, however, things began to change dramatically.

A New Option Pack

The day after I was baptized, I was sitting on my living room floor with my Bible open. I was so thankful I had been obedient to being baptized. I felt the ease in my heart that comes from finally doing what I felt I was to do.

I wanted to praise God, so I went to say aloud two words I had learned in Hebrew that meant, "Praise God." They were, "Hallal Jah," from which we get the word, "Hallelujah."

I opened my mouth and spoke, "Hallal Jah," but the words didn't end there. Out of my mouth flowed a seemingly unending stream of words I had never heard or learned before. They came rapid fire, as if unloading a cartridge of never-ending bullets from a gun. After 5-10 seconds, I stopped, surprised, and took a breath. I opened my mouth again and out streamed more words, unending words, words that I didn't understand but were distinct and continual.

I took another breath and began to speak again.

"What is happening to my tongue?" I thought. It was wagging back and forth rapidly every time I spoke. I took hold of it with two fingers to try to feel what it was doing as I was speaking.

“My tongue!” I thought. “What is happening to my tongue?”

And then it hit me. “My *tongue*. I’m speaking in *tongues!*” I was amazed, intrigued, and more than a little bit stunned.

Physically, scientifically, I was curious how this phenomenon was working. I began testing what I could do with it. I spoke in a lower voice and could speak and hear it clearly. I spoke higher and could speak and hear it clearly still. I slowed it down and tried to listen for consonants and vowels; there were certain sounds that I recognized, but other sounds that were entirely new. It was perhaps Asian sounding, with glottal stops and unexpected variations in tongue placement in my mouth that I had never experienced before. Certain consonants were there, but others were missing entirely. I kept speaking, fully able to speak in English at any time, but also equally able to speak in this other language at any time as well. I was able to do either at any moment without giving it a second thought.

It was a full-blown language, as if God had downloaded an option pack into my body.

“Tongues.” I thought. “I wasn’t asking for the gift of tongues!”

More Tools

Intrigued as I was by what was happening, I wasn't exactly happy about it. Like getting socks for my birthday, this wasn't the kind of gift I had ever wanted before.

I stood up and continued testing it out, surprised that I could keep speaking in tongues even while picking up a bag of garbage and taking it outside to the dumpster. I'm not sure what I expected, but I was surprised I could do something so remarkably mundane while also doing something so remarkably supernatural. It was fascinating.

The reason I had never wanted the gift of tongues before was because I didn't want to be part of something I considered controversial. I didn't realize that over half the Christians in the world were part of denominations that considered speaking in tongues to be a normal Christian experience. In the circles in which I ran, speaking in tongues was a rarity.

A good friend of mine had asked me to consider asking God to give me the gift of tongues. She said she had found it to be so helpful in her life, she wanted the gift for me, too. She told me how, when she was walking and talking to others about God in rough areas on the streets in the downtown area of her city, that sometimes people would pull guns or

knives on her. She called out to God to give her some spiritual weapons, some more tools, so she could do battle where the real battle was taking place—in their hearts and in their minds.

God answered her prayers and gave her the gift of tongues, among other gifts. As she began praying in tongues and walking through the streets, she began getting words in English, too. Talking to one hardened woman on the streets, for instance, she felt the woman was considering having an abortion. She said to the woman, “You’re about to get an abortion, aren’t you?” The woman broke down in tears, dropped her defenses, and gave her life to Christ.

I was fascinated by my friend’s stories, but I still didn’t want the gift of tongues for myself. It wasn’t the gift that I was opposed to. It was the controversy that surrounded it.

Now, here I was, the day after my baptism, speaking in a language I had never learned or heard before. Although it wasn’t the gift I wanted as I had looked through the various spiritual gifts, I also knew it wasn’t up to me to decide which gifts I would get. That was up to the Holy Spirit. As the Bible says when talking about spiritual gifts, “All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and He distributes them to each one, just as He determines” (1 Corinthians 12:11).

I didn't want to be ungrateful for a gift I had been given or to try to give it back. So I decided to put it to use as best I could, believing that if God had given it to me, He would use it, like all gifts He gives, for the "common good" (see 1 Corinthians 12:7).

I figured I didn't have to tell anyone about it, did I? I could use it by myself, in my own prayer time, which I did—at least until the day God called on me to speak in tongues out loud.

One Little Tear

One day, while praying during my quiet time, I felt God prompting me to pray in tongues out loud while praying for others.

I was reading again a chapter in the Bible about spiritual gifts and how some people were given the gifts of teaching or preaching and some the gift of tongues.

“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good” (1 Corinthians 12:7). Was it enough for me to pray in tongues by myself, oftentimes while praying for others, but not while I was in the presence of others? Or was I supposed to use this gift out loud while praying for them? It was fear, mainly, that was holding me back from doing the latter. I was afraid of what others might think.

By this time, I felt confident enough in using my gift privately, knowing that it had provided a great help to me to “pray in the Spirit” when I didn’t know what to pray on my own. Although I was still fearful, I decided I was willing to pray in front of others if the right situation arose.

Not long after this, one such situation did arise.

I had heard from a friend that one of our mutual friends had gotten a divorce. I was

shocked and heartbroken, unconvinced that this was the right thing for them to do. I began praying for them that God would reverse their situation and help them get back together again.

This couple was older than me by about twenty years, and had been married longer than me by about that much as well. They lived several states away from me, so I didn't see them very often. Whenever I did, however, I felt they were made for each other. To imagine them apart just didn't make sense to me.

I didn't know the husband very well, though, and I didn't feel comfortable calling him directly. I asked the woman's mother what she thought about the divorce.

"Good riddance," was her summary. She never wanted to see the man again. I asked someone else who knew them well, who echoed the same. I then asked the wife herself what she thought, and she said the same, even more forcefully.

I said to Lana, "Are we the only ones praying for them to get back together?" It sure felt like we were.

One day at work, I learned about a possible business trip that I might be able to take to the city where they lived to speak at a conference there. I felt this might give me a chance to speak to the husband in person, so I submitted a topic to the conference organizers to possibly share there.

I was sure I was to going to get to speak to him in his city, but my topic was turned down! Boldly, I submitted another topic. This one was accepted, and I was on my way! I'm thankful I didn't let that first rejection discourage me from what I felt I was to do.

While making my plans for the trip, I contacted the husband to see if we could get together while I was in town for business. He agreed.

We met at an ice-skating rink where his daughter was practicing for a figure skating competition. I listened to his story from the beginning, about how difficult things had become in their marriage, and about how it had finally ended in their divorce.

In spite of all he told me, I was still unconvinced they should be apart.

I began telling him stories of how God had worked in my life.

The man was intrigued and kept asking questions, so I kept telling him story after story. After we dropped off his daughter at her house, he drove me to where I was staying.

Before I got out of the car, I asked if I could pray for him. He agreed. I had already said everything I felt I could say and felt at a loss for what else I could tell him. Having run out of words on my own, this seemed like that "right situation" that God had prepared me for—to ask the Holy Spirit more directly into our

conversation to speak words where I had none left.

Before starting my prayer, I told this man that God had given me a prayer language, and I wondered if it would be okay if I used it while we prayed. Again, he agreed.

I began praying in tongues for him, out loud, switching back to English from time to time as new thoughts came to me, trusting that this was God's Spirit giving me more to say. By the end of the prayer, I looked up and he seemed completely unmoved, except for one little tear in the corner of his eye.

I asked if he had a Bible. He didn't, so I gave him mine, encouraging him to read it.

Having nothing else to say, I got out of the car, slept for the night, and flew home the next day. I wondered if it had made any difference at all, wondered if I had made a mistake, and wondered if I had perhaps ticked him off and likely embarrassed myself in front of him, all at the same time.

One month later, I found out.

Radically Saved

Almost a month later, I decided to call him. I had been afraid to talk to him the first time, and I was doubly afraid to talk to him again after our visit.

He was a self-made man who came to America with nothing from another country on the other side of the world, then built a name for himself and a business worth plenty.

He was not only twenty years my senior, but his character was intimidating as well. He had a strong personality, one which was affected by the fact that everything he touched seemed to turn to gold.

But I decided to call because I heard about a men's conference that was going to be held near him. I thought it would really help him, so I wanted to see if he would come with me if I came.

I hadn't heard a word from him since my visit a month earlier. So with fear in my heart, but a willingness that came only by faith, I picked up the phone and gave him a call.

To my shock, he told me the most amazing story about how, during our prayer in the car, God had touched him so much that that was the first time he had ever cried in his life! He said he had never, ever cried before.

That one little tear, which I thought was barely a drop, was for him the release of years of pain. He said he put his faith in Christ that night for the very first time in his life.

The next day, he started reading the Bible I gave him, finishing book after book in it and was well on his way to finishing the whole thing.

The Bible was speaking to him so much, he said, that he found a local Christian bookstore and bought more Bibles, not just for himself, but to give away to his friends! He wanted everyone to read this book that was speaking so much to him!

He said he had cried buckets of tears in the month since that night in his car. Would he like to go to the men's conference? Absolutely!

I went, and while there he shared more of his story with me.

I learned that his parents had been missionaries their whole lives and had been praying for him for years, their prodigal son who had never returned home to the faith—not until that night at least. They were overjoyed at his radical salvation. It turned out that Lana and I weren't the only ones praying for him! Praise God!

He was thrilled with his newfound faith, and I was thrilled to hear the story. What about getting back together with his wife, I asked?

Absolutely not, he said. Too much water under that bridge. He was going forward with his new fiancé, no matter what.

I was dumbfounded by his response, and I told him so, quite forcefully. He disagreed, just as forcefully.

When I got home from the conference, I wrote him a letter, telling him what I felt about the things he had said about his ex-wife and his unwillingness to reconcile with her. I wrote it on several pages of yellow legal paper and mailed it to him. I didn't hear from him for almost a year.

But one year later, on the anniversary date of when I had first visited him, he called me. He said he was calling from his ex-wife's house, that he broken off his engagement with his fiancé, had reconciled with his wife, and they were going to get married again in just a few months!

He said that on the day I had first visited him, he had been out shopping with his new fiancé picking out their wedding rings.

Had I not come out at just that moment, his life would have taken an entirely different course. Instead, he was now back with his wife, had started going to seminary, and eventually became a pastor of a church in his city comprised of people from the country where his parents had been missionaries.

Where would he be now, he said, or his wife now, or his kids now, had God not

prompted me to go and visit him? Where would he be now, I thought, had I not believed God and pushed for that business trip even though it was cancelled at first? Where would he be now, had I not prayed for him out loud in words the Holy Spirit spoke through me to his heart when I had run out of words of my own? And where would he be now had I not given him my Bible so he could read God's Words for himself?

He mailed that Bible back to me, signed and dated on that one-year anniversary, inscribed with the words, "A gift from God." And it was.

Like all good gifts from God, this one, too, had been given for the "common good." I was convicted that I needed to keep using my gifts for God even more.

Praying for a Child

I happened to be in Houston visiting some friends when they shared some sad, sad news with me. We were driving in their car and they mentioned they had recently heard from their doctor that they would never be able to have children.

I was as devastated by their news as they were. I knew how much they both wanted kids and had been trying for several years. After many tests and difficult results, the doctor declared the wife to be infertile.

My heart went out to them, and I asked if I could pray for them. So we went to their home, sat down on their living room floor, and we began to talk. I started asking them some questions, and I learned that there was more going on than just their inability to have children. They had been struggling in their marriage with various frustrations and disappointments on both sides. As we talked, we began to pray for each thing they mentioned. We could all three see the clouds of discouragement lift from over them. They talked, forgave one another, and expressed their love and commitment to each other again.

After two or three hours of talking and praying, we finally began praying for their physical healing, too. As we did, I felt God say

to me that they would have a child within a year! I was too shocked to speak it out loud and too nervous to say anything about it in case I was wrong. I just treasured those words in my heart and left the couple that night full of faith—and full of the joy of seeing their marriage renewed.

I flew home, as I had been traveling when I went to visit them, and checked back with them a month later. I asked the husband how things were going. He could hardly contain himself talking about how much God had done in their marriage that night. He was over-the-top in his description of their new love for each other. I asked if there was any news yet on the baby front, but there was none. He was just so thankful for the healing prayers for their marriage.

The next month I called again. Again, the husband was so thankful and ecstatic about their marriage. But no pregnancy yet. I kept praying.

Three months later, I called again. Doing the math, I knew that for them to have a baby in a year would take nine months plus three. How were they doing? Still great, but still no pregnancy. I was sure I had heard from God. I didn't know how to take it. This wasn't about me and hearing right. It was about them and their desire for a child. So I kept praying. God asked me specifically one day if I believed He was able to do this—and I said, "Yes."

Four months after we had prayed, the husband called with incredible news. They were expecting! It would have been unbelievable—except for the fact that I had told God I believed He could do this. Now I could believe it, not just by faith, but by this good report as well.

One year and one month after God had spoken to me that they would “have a child within a year,” they had a healthy baby boy. After all those years of waiting, and the doctors saying they’d never be able to have a child. God said otherwise. I wasn’t going to quibble over whether it was within a year or one month. They’ve never had another child, neither before nor since. But they had that one, just as God had spoken.

The same week I was writing this chapter, I happened to be in the same city where their son had just moved. I reached out to him to see if we could get together and we did. He’s now 24 years old, going to seminary, and has committed his life to ministry as well—now 25 years after I prayed with his parents for a child.

We both rejoiced that God still speaks, God still heals, and God still hears our prayers.

As God has said numerous times to numerous people in the Bible and to people living today, “Nothing is impossible with Him.”

Nothing.

Controversy

Not every experience of praying in tongues with others has been received so well.

While I was serving at a church in Texas, a couple asked if I could pray for them. They were trying to have children, but couldn't. I had seen several couples conceive when I prayed for them, so this couple came to me for prayer, too.

After telling me their story, we began to pray. But before I started, I asked if it would be okay to pray in a prayer language God had given me. I said that without it I felt like a doctor going into surgery without a scalpel. They agreed, and we prayed.

After the prayer, they seemed thankful and went home. The next day, however, the senior pastor of my church told me the couple had decided to leave the church. They said it was because I had prayed for them in tongues and they didn't want to be part of a church like that. I was crushed. I had been as polite and graceful about it as I knew how, and they had seemed as open and receptive to it as they could be.

There was nothing more I could do, the pastor told me. They were gone.

Two months later, I was leading worship and I was shocked to see them sitting on the front row!

After the service, they came up to me and I asked, "What happened?"

They said, "We're expecting!"

I nearly cried on the spot. God came through, once again, doing a work in their lives that went beyond anything I could do. Here I almost let that experience, and my resulting fear, dissuade me from ever praying in tongues out loud for anyone again. Thankfully, God persuaded me that day otherwise and encouraged me to keep using the gifts He has given me for Him.

I still try to be judicious and wise in when and where I pray in tongues so as not to be a distraction or cause unnecessary problems. Oftentimes, I'll pray quietly under my breath, both in English and in tongues, as I don't feel it's always necessary to pray out loud.

But when the stakes are high, when lives are on the line, or when I feel it's the best for those I'm praying for, I pray out loud with all my might. I've found that people are often grateful for a prayer that's truly passionate and heartfelt, no matter what the language.

And God comes through, time after time after time, because He loves to hear and answer our prayers.

A New Gift for a New Ministry

After returning from Israel, God continued speaking to me about many things, including praying for my new piano, going to Japan, and how He was going to provide for me in the months and years to come (more on those in another book!) But one thing He especially did for me was to provide me with a new gift for my new ministry.

It started when I went to St. Louis to visit some friends for the weekend. One of them sat next to me to pray for me, but she said she wanted to sit on my left side so she could specifically pray for me in my left ear. I told her that was good because it was harder for me to hear in my right ear. She asked how long that had been, and I said it had always been that way.

I'd had my ears tested, but the tests showed there was no difference in my hearing in either ear. Yet it always seemed easier for me to hear in my left ear. I usually talk on the phone using my left ear, as I feel I can hear better that way.

She commented that it was interesting because she and others had experienced similar things, but in the way they hear from God. That's why she wanted to pray for me specifi-

cally on my left side, in fact, because she felt from God that it was important to do so. I took note of what she said but didn't think much more about it and went on with our prayers.

The chief concern on my heart that weekend was the woman with cancer for whom I had prayed. It was only a few weeks later by that time, and she was sicker than she had ever been before. The doctors thought any day now could be her last.

I was still praying for her complete healing, but I had also been reading several Bible stories about people being raised from the dead: Jesus, of course, and Lazarus, the synagogue ruler's daughter, the widow's son, the man who fell out of the third-story window while Paul was preaching. I was being filled to the full with faith that even if this woman were to die, I was ready to pray that God would raise her back from the dead. I was full of faith that God could do it and was even encouraged by the young son of one of my friends in St. Louis who said, "It's easier to pray for someone who's dead because they can't resist your prayers." I thought there was a world of wisdom in that statement for a boy so young!

I got a chance to test my faith when later that day I received a phone call from the woman's husband. His wife had died. I was heartbroken for him, but overjoyed that she was now able to see God face-to-face and hear

from Him every day for the rest of eternity. That was the one thing she had prayed for above all else. Praise God!

But I was still willing to pray for her to be raised from the dead, and I wanted to be there in person to do it. I checked into flights to Texas and found one leaving the next day. I booked it, both to be there for the funeral and to pray for her.

I told my friends I was worried I would get there too late, that they would have probably already embalmed her body before I could arrive. But my friend said, "If God wants to raise her from the dead, embalming fluid will be the least of your worries." Jesus had called Lazarus back after he had been dead for four days, wrapped in cloths and already odorous from decay. And Lazarus not only came back from the dead, but he was healed of whatever caused him to die in the first place! God breathed life into Adam whom He had formed out of dirt (Genesis 2:7), and He can breathe life back into dry bones (Ezekiel 37:4). I knew God could bring this woman back to life at any moment, too.

I hadn't packed for a trip to Texas when I left for St. Louis, and I knew the funeral was going to be at a very formal church there. I wished I had a suit to wear. My friend offered me to try on one of her husband's suits from his closet, and it fit, so I threw it in my bag to take with me to Texas. When I arrived, I again

stayed with my friend who had prayed with me a few weeks earlier about quitting my job. We were sitting on his couch, talking about all that was going on, when all of a sudden, he put his hand next to my right ear and snapped his fingers loudly.

“Why did you do that?” I said.

“I don’t know,” he said. “I just felt like God wanted me to do it and to see if you could hear from that ear.”

I hadn’t told him anything about my hearing in that ear. I had only told my friends in St. Louis the day before, whom he didn’t know. Something began to happen, though, starting during those two days and continuing now for more than 25 years, resulting in one of the most profound and helpful gifts God has ever given me.

This is the Way

Over the next few days, I began experiencing a strong ringing in my ears, but only one at a time. It wasn't a normal ringing, though, but almost like someone tugging on my ear, making me want to listen closer in that direction. Whenever my left ear would ring like this, it seemed like God wanted me to do whatever it was that I was considering doing. But when my right ear would ring, He didn't want me to do it. It was as if God were bringing to life for me the verse from Isaiah 30:21 that says, "Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you saying, 'this is the way; walk in it.'"

I had never heard of such a thing, although I have often heard people say that they have heard from God in ways that they just knew that they knew that God was speaking to them. How He specifically does it seems to vary with each person individually, as He really does have a personal relationship with each one of us. For me, being inquisitive as when I received the gift of tongues five years earlier, I began to try out this new gift, giving it a bit of a test drive to see how it worked and whether it worked on a repeatable basis. And it did!

That next weekend, I went with my friend to a men's retreat he was leading. He asked me

to talk to the men on the opening night. As I was planning my talk on our drive to the retreat, my friend said that I could plan it out, but that He wanted me to listen to God as I was speaking, that God would guide me whether to go to the right or the left. My friend mentioned the verse, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death" (Proverbs 14:12). We took note and laughed that the verse said there was a way that seems "right" to a man, as it was my right ear that would ring when I considered something I thought was a good idea, but that God would override and tell me to do otherwise. It was an easy way for me to remember that although something seemed "right," God had other things in mind. Whenever my left ear would ring, even if it seemed less likely to be the thing to do in the natural world, I could know I was on the path God wanted. The strength of the ringing also seemed to correspond to the strength with which God was directing me, like He was pulling on my ear, like you would pull the reins on a horse, but He was doing it audibly.

As I was praying about my message, I prayed that God would speak to each and every man there, and my left ear rang as I said that as if to say that's exactly what God was going to do. I was encouraged by this when I began to speak, knowing that God would

speaking to every man there. I totally believed it would happen.

I was only about one-third of the way through my prepared remarks, and still in the middle of a story, when my friend who had invited me looked at me and signaled for me to stop. God had done it, apparently.

How could He have already done it, I thought, with so little said? But I watched over the next 45 minutes as man after man spoke about how God had just spoken to them about their exact situation they were facing. Fifteen of the seventeen men shared while we were still gathered together in a circle. What about the other two, though, I wondered?

After we had broken up for a snack, one of them came up to me to share about how God had spoken to him, too, but it was very personal and he didn't want to say it in front of the group. Ten minutes later the remaining man came to me to tell me how God had just spoken to him as well through that talk. Seventeen for seventeen! And I had not prompted them or told them what God had said to me beforehand about how God would speak to each and every one of them. I didn't even get to share two-thirds of what I had planned to say!

But God had done what He said, as though speaking to me over my shoulder and into my ear, that this was exactly what He had wanted to do. I have tested and kicked the tires on this

gift for 25 years and counting, and it still rings true. I've even had my ears professionally tested again to see if there might be something wrong with them, but the testing shows that are perfectly fine in every way!

After all these years, I'm still amazed by God. He really is the best. He really does lead and guide us in personal and unique ways, if we're willing to listen to Him as He says, "This is the way; walk in it."

Test the Spirits

“Dear friends,” wrote the Apostle John, “do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God...” (1 John 4:1a). John went on to say that we can test the spirits and see if they really are from God or not.

Hearing God speak to me is one of the areas I have tested often, sometimes in simple ways, yet I’ve seen it come true as God had said. For instance, I’ll be considering calling a particular auto store, thinking they’ll surely have a common part that I need. But then God will tug on my right ear, indicating that I don’t need to call. Yet I’ll call anyway just to see, and it holds true. “Sorry, we don’t have that part,” they’ll say. I’ve tested this so often that I no longer need evidence that this is a true gift of God, as I can’t always know which way to go on my own.

What I really need more from God is the faith to do whatever He says, especially when it goes against what I think is “right.”

One of the most surprising to me was when three times God spoke to me that it was imperative that Lana not get pregnant again, each time at a moment of intimacy where it could quite possibly happen had I not been especially careful. Surely not, God, I thought.

Lana had wanted twelve kids when we first got married, and by this time we had six.

I would have been glad to have more. But not just once or twice, it was three times that God made it clear to me that she was not to get pregnant. Whether it was for a season or for life, I wasn't sure, but it was clear to me that I was to take extra care in this regard. It's one thing to say you'll trust God for how many children He wants you to have and then keep having sex in a way that you could conceivably get pregnant again and again. It's another to say you'll trust God when you already have a number in mind—but the number God has in mind doesn't match.

I didn't tell Lana the first two times that this happened and God tugged on my right ear. I just took extra care. But the third time, I could no longer avoid telling her. In a way, she was relieved, as she said she was wearing out caring for six kids and me, plus a niece and her dad, both of whom had come to live with us for a time. But in another way, we both wondered why there was such a strong warning, and eventually came to believe this was to be a lifelong decision, so I had surgery so that she would no longer get pregnant.

Six months after that, we found a lump in Lana's breast which turned out to be Stage IV cancer. It had already spread throughout her body. Less than a year later, Lana was gone.

I don't know how I could have taken care of any more kids when that happened, and I don't know what might have happened to any child that might have been conceived in her body while she was battling cancer at the same time.

This was not a matter of whether or not a store had a part that I needed. This was literally a matter of life or death, and God wanted me to know what He wanted me to do. God was protecting us and future children from harm from something neither of us could have known about in any other way at the time.

"There is a way that seems right to a man," as the Bible says, "but in the end it leads to death."

God really does speak, if we're willing to listen, step out in faith, and obey.

The Suit Fit

Back to my prayers that God would raise this woman from the dead...

I was in Texas getting ready to attend her visitation and funeral, full of faith that God really could still raise her.

When I got to the funeral home, and after most of the people had left, I laid my hands on the coffin and prayed with all the faith I had that she would be raised, but she wasn't. I prayed again at the cemetery the next day, staying behind after everyone else had gone, while they lowered her body into the ground. Still nothing.

When I got home to Illinois, a friend asked how the woman was doing for whom I had been praying.

"Oh, I'm sorry," I said. "I thought I told you she had died."

"Oh, yes, I know," she said, "I just wondered how she was doing now."

My friend was still as full of faith as I was that God could do anything, absolutely anything.

People's reactions to my story about praying for this woman and quitting my job and going to Israel have been interesting. One man drove over to my house to hear it from me in person, saying that he wanted to come and

touch me because I was the closest thing to an apostle he had ever seen.

Another asked me to pray for her to be healed, saying she had just been diagnosed with cancer. I looked at her, bewildered, saying, "Didn't you just hear me say that the first person I prayed for after going into full-time ministry died?" I couldn't believe she wanted to me to pray for her still.

Not every reaction was positive. One woman who had heard me share my story at her church came up to me after my message. She said, "The more you talked, the angrier I got. But when you said the woman you had prayed for had died, I was so relieved."

I was shocked at her response, but it turned out that her husband had died of cancer, and she was just sure that at the end of my story I was going to say this woman had been physically healed. And if so, she was going to be so mad at God, because she had prayed for her husband and he had died. It's interesting to me that the ending I would have wished for isn't always the ending people need to hear.

Perhaps the most astounding response came from one of my aunts who, after sharing with her all about praying for this woman, quitting my job, going to Israel, returning and praying unsuccessfully that God would raise her from the dead, said, "I can't believe it! I just can't believe it!"

"I know!" I said, "I can't believe it, either."

“I can’t believe the suit fit!” She was proper to a T, and the most amazing thing to her from my story was that God would give me a suit for the funeral that fit. God spoke to her in a way that she needed to hear, that God really cared. And that’s what spoke to her. My mind went back to the men’s retreat and how God had spoken to seventeen out of seventeen men, each in their own way.

God really can speak to each person in their own unique way, if we’ll just walk in faith and keep telling our story.

Conclusion:

O Ye of Mini Faith

I have many more stories to tell. I feel like I'm just getting started. But let me close this book with one more, and I'll save the rest for another time. For as the Apostle John said, "Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written" (John 21:25).

I'd like to tell you this last story because you might think I'm unique, that these things I've shared with you might have happened to me, but they don't or won't happen to you. The truth is, God has given me a gift of faith specifically to help you step out in your faith and see these things happen in your life, too.

I don't know that I have a specific gift of healing or prophecy or teaching or mercy or anything else. But what I do have is a gift of faith, believing that God can do anything, absolutely anything. And when you have faith, anything is possible!

Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it

will move. Nothing will be impossible for you” (Matthew 17:20).

I had less than a mustard seed of faith one night when Lana was telling me about a car she wanted to replace hers that was on its last legs. She had never cared about styles or makes or even colors of cars before. She just wanted them to be able to get her from here to there. But for some reason, she was taken with the idea of getting a very specific car: a little red Mini Cooper. They were still quite a rarity here in Illinois at that time.

She and my oldest daughter looked online to see if she could find one. When she did, she showed me the price. I said I was sorry but there was no way we'd be able to get one of those. She mentioned it to me again that night as we were lying in bed.

Rather than repeat what I had already told her, I remembered something one of my friends had said to his daughter when he sent her off to college. He said he sent her off with only his prayers, as that's all he could give her. With a smile, he added, “The same God who takes care of me will take care of you!”

I decided to tell Lana that story in that moment in bed, then I said the same thing to her. I told her I'd pray for her, adding as a joke as much as anything else, “The same God who takes care of me will take care of you!” And I rolled over and went to sleep.

But the next morning, the joke was on me! Eight hours later, I was pulling into our church parking lot for a morning men's group when right behind me pulled up a car driven by someone who had never been to the group before. He parked right next to me—in his little red Mini Cooper.

As we got out of our cars, I said, "You don't happen to be selling your car, do you?"

He said, "Actually, I am!" He offered for me to take it for a test drive when the meeting was over.

After our meeting, as I was sitting in the parking lot in the driver's seat of a little red Mini Cooper, I looked at the side view mirror and could see the red of the car reflected in it. Along the bottom of the mirror I read these words: "Objects in mirror are closer than they appear."

I couldn't believe it. I went home and told Lana the story. Although we didn't have the money right then to buy his car, I told Lana, "The same God who takes care of me really will take care of you."

About six months later, God made a way for us to get a car just like it, just like Lana wanted. "Objects in mirror really are closer than they appear."

When Lana passed away, her car passed on to my oldest daughter who felt God speaking to her through it, too. The same God who

took care of Lana and me would take care of her as well.

Five years later, when my car wore out and I needed a new one, I wondered if I might be able to find a Mini Cooper like hers, but a convertible, as I really love the open air, and in charcoal gray like the first car I had bought on my own. I found one online, drove to Chicago to take a look, and took it for a test drive in the snow with the top down, loving every second of feeling the snow falling gently on me as I drove. God made a way for me to buy it, too, and I drove it home that day.

Two years later, one of my other kids needed a car for work, so my oldest daughter passed along the little red Mini Cooper and bought another one for herself—a light blue convertible.

Unbelievably, we now have three Mini Coopers in our family, all of which are now fully paid for.

I painted a picture of mine one day, based on a photograph I had taken the day I bought it in the snow with the top down. I never thought I could buy one, let alone two, and eventually three. I titled my painting, “O Ye of Mini Faith.”

What I thought was impossible, and had barely a mustard seed of faith for, had turned into something far beyond what I could imagine. As the Bible says: “Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask

or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be the glory.." (Ephesians 3:20-21).

Faith isn't about getting cars or things or everything we've ever wanted. To be honest, some days I feel like I've lost more way than I've gained, even though I know that isn't true, either. Faith is about believing in God, believing He exists, and trusting that He will reward those who earnestly seek Him. As the Bible says, "Without faith, it's impossible to please God, for anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists, and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

I pray you would be full of faith today and every day for the rest of your life. Know that God really does exist, and that He really will reward you as you earnestly seek Him.

My stories of faith aren't just for me. They're for you, too.

The same God who takes care of me really will take care of you.

Eric Elder

There's More!

Don't stop now! You can read more stories and get a boost in your faith anytime by visiting any of these inspirational websites:

theranch.org
ericelder.com
and inspiringbooks.com