

Love Endures

Hope Abounds

by Alan Updyke

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of

God (Rom 8:14)

Love Endures Hope Abounds

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Author's Note:

As you read the life-changing conversations and experiences of Robert Love, I hope you will take the time to also consider my notes, further explaining the principles expressed in the story. Hot links are provided for e-book readers and page numbers for those of you with a print copy.

I am also asking you to share this book with others who are in trouble, by sending them links to these pages, hosted at [Updyke Books.com](#), using the symbols for Facebook, Twitter, Google, or Email. This has proven to be an effective way to encourage those who need support during a crisis in their life. I have written this book for them. I have seen it affect change in the lives of many, and it will help your friend.

Preface:

Don't despair, my friend. There is always hope.

I'm praying that you be moved when you read this book, even inspired. At the least, I hope that you are encouraged and determined to share the hope of enduring love with someone special in your life, someone that needs God.

This book is designed to be interactive with the internet and social media. Use my web site, UpdykeBooks.com, to obtain my booklet on adultery, to access excerpts designed to encourage others, and to order print copies that will be sent directly to those that you designate.

Spiritual understanding is a journey. The Glossary includes the Scripture verses referenced at the links. These will guide you as you study and search for God. Wisdom will grow here.

Perhaps this book is meant for someone you know at home, church, or work. Order them a paper copy. Write a message on the inside of the front cover, and then pray for that person. (see [Post Script](#)).

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Following is an alphabetical index of hot links. A Glossary of these terms is included at the end of the book.

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PART ONE: Despairing

The stark contrasts of life's experiences sometimes feel like cruel contradictions. Light versus darkness. Good versus evil. Love diminished by hatred. Life that ultimately leads to death.

Robert Love sat alone in the tabernacle, a place that had hosted contrasting events during his tenure there as pastor. Babies were baptized, welcoming new life, and funerals were held for the deceased. The large stained glass windows that usually filled the sanctuary with bright colors attracting viewers to brilliant scenes eliciting serenity were now dull and seemingly lifeless. The gloomy weather this day had hidden the sun even as the clouds indicated the sadness that settled upon his soul. Peace verses war. Today the warring factions were active and discouragement was claiming new territory for the enemy. Love felt ready to implode from the inside out.

The sanctuary of St. James of Stanton was often the place where a needy person would come to seek God's presence. Warm and inviting. But today it felt dark and cold. The slate gray granite stones of the walls, stacked one upon the other, loomed in the dim light as they reached upward from the polished black marble floor and seemed to be a cover for the evil spirits that hid, lurking nearby. For a minute, Love felt their presence and wondered if they had come to reside in this church building, escaped from the many corpses of the dark souls that were displayed here in open caskets.

It seems that when a man is discouraged his emotions are squelched by an impending silence. He goes deeper into a place of gloom, flaunting with despair in a manly way, unwilling and unable to retreat, yet all the while needing refuge. There will be no tears of relief for him.

"No. I won't." The thought was in response to the demands that he reminded himself of. Love had strived to believe that his efforts were worthwhile, and he hoped that God would help and honor him for his determined service. But today his answer was simply, "no." He had had enough. He lacked the fortitude to go on.

You may ask what it was that he faced. What was it that was so difficult that it pressed heavily upon the soul of this clergyman? In truth,

it would have been enough this day had it been nothing more than the unrelenting demands of his weekly schedule. Mrs. Doran was complaining about the lack of volunteers for the children's classes. Mr. Meade wanted advice on the proposed budget for next year as they faced a significant shortfall in revenue. A telephone message had just informed Pastor Love of the expected demise of Bill Reddy, who had been fighting cancer for the past six months. His funeral service needed to be urgently confirmed. All these requests were normal, routine, and even mundane in the process of running this parish. But today, Love was tired and discouraged.

“NO!” he heard himself say abruptly. The sound of his voice, as a command, echoed off the masonry walls and the clarity of its return startled him as he heard himself repeated. Was he actually refusing to continue in his service at St. James? The spoken word seemed to continue to resound within the stone fortress that now felt more like a prison than a place of worship to its pastor. Love dropped his head in shame and despair. His thoughts did not form words for prayer, but instead memories began to flood into his mind. They brought an even greater challenge, the need to reconcile the past with this present reality. Love wondered if his life had become nothing more than a big mistake.

But there was something much more disturbing to him. It was the accusation. Love had been instructed not to leave the city after being questioned by local police as they considered charges of sexual assault against him. The accusation came from a beautiful young woman who produced evidence of her legal status – she was a minor.

Now, everything tilted on the edge of the abyss, ready to fall into the pit of blackness and death. His life's work, his reputation, the reputation of his church, the patience and perseverance which he believed pleased God as he persisted to serve the needs of others in denial of himself, the willingness of others to regard him as a pastor, even his own faith. It was all about to careen down into the pit that led to Hates.

“Oh God, why?” More than a prayer his words were a complaint against the deity he had trusted, even dedicated his life to. Love's thoughts began to swirl within his head and the awareness of his surroundings faded as he closed his eyes and leaned back into the church pew. He began to search into his past for a clue in explanation of the desertion he now experienced.

Truly alone, feeling lost in time and space, his head hanging low, tears were dropping onto his pants. Already disgraced, he felt little need to defend himself. Little did he know that they would soon be coming

with a warrant for his arrest. The police had been ordered by the District Attorney to bring this pastor in to answer his accuser for the crimes she alleged.

There had been many arrests of the clergy in recent times, the institutional church was weak, and the public was hungry for revenge.

PART TWO: Remembering

Deep wounds eventually heal but what remains is an ugly scar. Is the scar proof, even a constant reminder, that the injury of that painful experience will never be completely healed? During the process of healing the wound oozes its unwelcome bodily fluids. It is physical cleansing and time for the emotional wound to also heal. Some believe the resulting scar is a permanent seal that allows the injured to disregard the physical damage, which was also an offense to the psyche, a mental and emotional trauma. Others see their scars as reminders of their fragility, even vulnerability to further injury, and live fearfully, withdrawn for protection, avoiding an encounter that may cause additional pain. For them, the wound never completely stops bleeding, especially when it is a matter of the heart. How you heal depends primarily on what you believe.

Love had many scars from the experience of his life. He regarded them more as medals of honor, indicating his will to survive

and the success he achieved in doing so with God's help. Today though, even that cornerstone of confidence, the foundation of his faith, had fallen into doubt.

1. The Meeting – A Strange Perspective

Eighteen Years Earlier

Everyone was competing for the chance to talk as they sat in a circle in a small room that appeared to be used most frequently as the children's nursery. The room was drab except for the stained glass window at one end. It bulged inward, appearing ready to burst at the corroded seams. Robert Love considered speaking, hoping not to look like a fool, but wanting to appear interested at the same time. Saying the right thing would meet the status quo of what was expected. Remaining silent might draw attention to him. Though a pleasant person most of the time, his name always drew a slight grin when he introduced himself to a new acquaintance. Sometimes he wished he had a different name. His implied too much.

He caught a few side-glances from others, those that noticed his silence. His wife nudged him in the ribs with her elbow. That was annoying. She had pressured him to come to this Sunday morning

meeting. There were many other things he'd rather be doing, in fact many that he could easily represent as more important. A woman to his right spoke for the third time with a high pitched voice, and seemed to expect everyone to hang on her every word as she paused for what seemed like minutes, all for effect. She seemed to be mad at God.

The teacher of the church lesson had been friendly and smiled too often, as he presented the material from the self-help book. His smile was stiff and his dentures appeared to be too large and gaudy as he noted that he was only offering his opinion based on years of experience, and that he was no expert on the subject matter. They were hearty matters of the soul. "*Why should I speak,*" Love pondered? "*What do I know about this?*" He glanced at his wristwatch, hoping it would bring relief, perhaps an announcement of release from the pressure he felt in this place. It seemed the light dimmed and the walls moved in closer, crowding him to the strangers he cared little about and really didn't want to know.

"I had a friend who had a very sick child. She was dying. Cancer, I think." The woman narrowed her eyes, and lowered her brows causing a crease to form boldly in her forehead. Then she clenched her fists. "My friend went to her pastor and asked him to pray for her

daughter. He wouldn't do it. He didn't pray with her and the little girl died. Why did God allow her to die? Why did He take her?"

Everyone seemed to shuffle in their seats at the same time.

Several tried to speak at once. They all seemed to agree on one thing.

The pastor was a louse. And, God's action seemed harsh, and difficult to understand.

"Perhaps you have it wrong." The words came from a middle-aged man who sat quietly off to one side. Love had not noticed him before, probably because he had not spoken either. The room grew quiet. A moment of silence permeated through the fog of confusion caused by too many words, like a beam of light penetrating through the pitch-blackness of night. His voice had a slight quiver as he continued. "God did not take the child, He received her."

The words rattled about in Love's head and trying to process the meaning of them he felt somehow relieved. Was this the affect of a word of truth? "*What does he really mean?*" he wondered, as Love lifted his head after a long time of studying his shoes and the floor. "*Who is this man?*"

Fast footsteps and voices were heard outside the room and the door quickly opened. "Mommy, Mommy, look what I made." Several kids rushed into the room seeking their parents, anxious to boast about

their Sunday School project, a half styrofoam cup scribbled upon with something glued to it. “Thanks for coming; hope to see you next week,” the leader quickly concluded. As he stood to his feet, glancing in space, Love heard the woman who had been agitated, complaining about a little boy who was walking on her coat. It was vinyl with faux fur trim. Somehow, it seemed to fit. Love turned to his wife and whispered in her ear, “Let’s get out of here.” She turned away abruptly and started a conversation with a nice looking man, about their age. She had the gift of gab. Men liked the attention they received from her, a woman who appeared much younger than her age, which gave her confidence for the experience of mingling with strangers. The church crowd seemed to be her specialty. With a few “excuse me’s” mumbled softly and a couple of nudges, Love pushed his way through the doorway into a large gathering room. Above the sanctuary door a clock counted down the minutes and seconds until the formal service would begin. It was time for his escape. Love felt his anger ignite as he pondered how long he’d have to wait in the parking lot.

He was stepping quickly as the door opened and a young woman carrying a child popped into his space. She looked surprised. “Excuse me,” Love muttered once again and darted for the opening as the thick door with an arched top eased shut assisted by a mechanism.

He reached into his jacket pockets, a habitual gesture of hiding, and felt a piece of thin plastic, as he walked briskly down the sidewalk steps. Pulling it out, he read his son's name, "Stephen." Stephen was dropped off downstairs at a nursery and Love was supposed to return the card upon retrieving the child, as proof of being his parent. "*Tough, I'm not going back,*" he said to himself as he dodged traffic and crossed the broken macadam to enter a dirt parking lot. Just the thought of returning made him quicken his steps. He wondered if his wife, Eve, would have trouble at the nursery room window as she requested her son without the identification card. "*Funny,*" he thought.

The parking lot had yellow lines painted in the dirt, encouraging visitors to park in close quarters. It was next to another church with a large paved lot. Love wondered what would happen if he parked there. "*So many rules.*" The driver of a small sedan waved as she pulled out onto the street. He half-heartedly waved back. "*Who is that?*" Then he saw him.

It was that middle-aged man from the class, leaning against the back of a dirty pick-up truck. The tailgate was missing, and Love saw that the black paint was scraped off the hauling bed, now adorned by the bright orange color of rust. The truck was a Ford, from the mid-nineties when the cab was rounded and made to look smaller. He had apparently

been watching Love approach, and now seemed to be ready to speak. A broad smile made this stranger feel welcoming, and Love paused in his tracks.

“He is giving us a beautiful day,” the man gestured as an introduction.

Love wasn't sure who “He” was, but played along. “Sun and sixty, not bad,” he replied. Now he was close enough to get a better look at the stranger. He stood at an average height with a husky build. He was fit. His hair was thinning and cut close, like an athlete or military man. His skin was brown, well tanned, and his mostly bald head blended well with his gray tinted hair on the sides. His clothes were casual and well fitted. Shoes were half boots with natural brown leather, slightly scuffed, but well maintained. Taking advantage of his frequent downward gaze, Love learned many years ago to grade strangers by their shoes. These indicated confidence and stability.

“John,” he said, extending a welcoming hand.

“I'm Robert,” Love answered as he made eye contact and grasped the hand: firm, rough skinned, and a strong grip. The stranger squeezed his hand hard as he gave it a friendly jerk. His smile grew, and his eyes glistened. He held the eye connection and Love felt something unusual about this man, his name almost forgotten by the surprise

feelings of the encounter. What was it about his eyes? There seemed to be an inner glow, almost like an LED bulb. This man had energy about him, as if somehow possessing life to a greater degree. “I liked what you said in there, I mean about God,” Love paused and listened to his words that seemed to be awkwardly blurted. He wondered if he made any sense.

“God is good all the time, yet, people want to blame Him for everything. But He loves us so much,” his words trailed off.

“Sometimes I just feel this strong urge to speak. I want to be a vessel used by my Savior. He gives me words. But hey, I didn’t mean to cause a stir,” John said.

“No, that’s OK,” Love was expressing a likeable feeling toward this very sincere person. “But God is in control, right?” He felt a puzzled look come over his face.

“He could be; He is all powerful,” John reasoned, “but God’s Presence is rejected by us, and repelled by the presence of evil. God is not compromised. We live in a fallen world, and most people are victimized by the evil of rebellion. Satan is real too, but no one seems to blame him.”

“I wish I could blame someone,” Love said in retort, with a feeling of disagreement rising in his throat. “No one gives me any slack.”

“I know, we’re supposed to be in control, and we are responsible. But are we really? I mean without the Lord’s intervention, even help, we are played like pawns on the chessboard of life. In our selfishness we become independent and reliant on ourselves, but that is a deception. We are weak and become controlled by the stronger force we associate with, even submit to. Ultimately, it defines us, or wins our soul. Everything that happens is part of the conflict of evil as it challenges the goodness of God’s creation. We are caught in the struggle, or great rebellion, but we can choose by faith to receive salvation and become one of His.”

“I’m not sure...” Love was interrupted by a child’s cry. Young Stephen was pulling at his mother’s hand and wailing in complaint, as he was nearly dragged across the roadway. One look at his wife’s face told him that he was in trouble. She often communicated more with her looks than her words. Robert was about to be blamed for his son’s misbehavior, and the discomfort and embarrassment it was causing his mother. “Got to go. But let’s talk again?”

“How about breakfast sometime?” John answered cautiously, sensing tension rising in what had seemed to be a curiously friendly conversation. “The State Room, every Wednesday.”

Love didn't answer, knowing that a commitment to a stranger would bring a host of questions, even an interrogation from his wife who makes no apology for committing him to meetings without his consent. She would defend her authority and privilege to make decisions concerning church and religion, as she asserted her accounting of his shortcomings, even accused him of abusive language and profanity. She always threatened to call his friends, to report in detail his shortcomings. Robert didn't want John to become her new threat. For Love to make a friend was a risky venture. Although others had remained through the conflict, he could always sense when they were trying to do the good deed of serving her after her plea for help and dissertation about how she is being victimized. He always wanted to ask about her call, but refused to pressure his friend, and lower himself to her tactics. Eventually suspicions grew on both sides of the aisle of strained accord, and they began to fall away. He certainly didn't blame them.

As he turned toward his wife, he saw her shoot a look of disapproval toward John. “What does he want?” she scolded, loud enough for him to hear.

“Nothing, We were just talking for a minute.”

“Trouble, that John Wright,” she said with scorn.

“John who? What do you know about him?”

“They were talking about him after the class. A radical, and potential trouble. Why do you always associate with them? You’re an outsider. Why can’t you try to fit in?” she warned.

Their paths separated as they approached their mini van, Eve headed for the passenger side, and Robert for the drivers’. He seized the opportunity to get a little distance from her. She slammed the car door after struggling for what seemed like ten minutes to get the child buckled into his safety seat. He continued to cry and threw a shoe at the dashboard.

“Why is he so upset?” Love asked.

“He wanted another donut after throwing one on the floor and stepping on it,” Eve informed the father accused of not helping. “You were no where to be found.”

“I know,” Love sneered. “You were busy talking.” He could feel his anger rising and rounded a corner a little too fast, causing Eve to be jarred in her seat as she dug in her purse for her phone. She was not wearing her seat belt. She turned toward him and appeared ready to scold, but quickly looked away and diverted her attention to the cell

phone and hastily began pushing buttons. It was even more humiliating than trying to have a conversation with her. Now he would have to listen to her complain about him to someone else, and keep his mouth shut, or look like a total fool. It felt like taking a sheep to the slaughter; he was the innocent and she was the butcher. But, it was a discomfort he had endured many times before, and learned to bear. He might blowup later, though.

2. Breakfast -

The Power of Evil

Wednesday started like any other day. Stephen was awake first, and demanded immediately to watch his shows on TV. Eve was shuffling around with a coffee cup in her hand, ignoring the little spills she make on the carpet that was less than two years old. Love lacked any ambition for this day, like most others. He tried to avoid contact with the others in his little family, as he heard her complaining about being late for work. As usual, she tried to do in three minutes what would take ten. Where were Stephen's shoes? It appeared that the little man would have a bad day at preschool after this start, but he was getting used to the lousy routine.

"This is pathetic," Love thought. *"Is there any hope?"*

"Do you know where his shoes are?" Eve demanded some help with one hand on her hip as she tugged on the small jacket, yanking it on Stephen's arm even though the second opening was inaccessible. He

began to frown. The toy gun he held was not fitting through the hand hole.

Love made no reply and walked down the hallway toward his office. He'd check email, gather a few papers and head out for the real estate office, even though he wasn't on the schedule to answer the phones that day. He had recently attended weekend classes and passed the exam to acquire his salesperson license. It was a bittersweet achievement. He liked real estate and was interested in acquiring more, for a rental or to flip. He was glad to have the inside track. It would have to be a real bargain and a sure thing, because... no, actually, he would not be investing because he had no money or remaining credit to use. Now it was about making the mortgage and paying the bills, so his best hope was for a closing. As he picked up his briefcase loaded with contracts and forms, he remembered the comment from a broker with many years experience. "Buyers are liars," he warned, "and sellers are yellers." The sentiment was something Love was realizing to be true, more every day with each and every contact he made in the business. He disliked buyers who would demand that he contact other listing agents for permission to see homes after work hours and on weekends. Some refused to be qualified by a moneylender. If Love pressured them to

contact a bank or mortgage broker, they acted like he had questioned their integrity. Some threatened to complain to his broker.

She was a person about his age, but pressured and intimidated almost everyone in the office. “What do you have today,” she would ask without beating around the bush. “Get busy, it costs money to keep your desk in this office,” she’d demand in front of colleagues while intending the humiliation that followed.

Love had enough business experience not to be intimidated, and knew enough to be resentful of the broker’s demands. If he had no sales, he would have no income. She demanded that he answer her phones for one eight-hour day each week. Real estate law was about defining and protecting the rights of buyers and sellers. Who represented who, and did they do it without any compromise? It was the rule in the office that a person could not have a substantive conversation about real estate until the person inquiring was read the Consumer Notice. If they were calling to inquire about a property advertised by the broker, a licensed agent would be referred to the call and was required to read them the notice before answering any questions.

It all seemed over rated and over regulated. Why couldn’t the receptionist give a description, address and price, and suggest to the interested party that they do a drive-by? Most of the time, this is all they

wanted to know. Such basics, in Love's opinion, did not divulge any information that could be disadvantageous to either party during negotiations. He saw it another way. Most calls were nuisance calls. They were buyers who had no money and a poor credit rating. The broker did not want to waste her time with them. Love most dreaded the callers with a heavy accent. They were difficult to talk to and often became irritable very quickly. He remembered one such caller who said he wanted to buy a grocery store in a bad section of town. He could only imagine. Still, he had to finesse each caller for the good of the agency and the broker's reputation of service to all without discrimination. In the months he had worked the phones at the office, he had not connected to even one legitimate buyer or seller. Some would ask about listings not held in his office, or seek a home at a specific place where they saw a sign. They didn't even know the address, but expected the agent at hand to know all about the property or to quickly do the required research for the answers they wanted. It was all for free.

A typical day at the office during which the broker did not come in consisted of joke telling all morning as most agents made a single call or sent a fax. Soon it was lunchtime and they went to the restaurant together, wasting another hour or two. After lunch, many used the office computers and internet connections to research personal interests. One

agent actually had others searching Ebay for an item similar to the one he just bought and resold for a profit.

Love was annoyed by the frivolous waste of time. “I have to make a living,” he complained. “I can make that phone call, send a fax or two and check the MLS from my home office in about an hour, then move on to something else, something worthwhile.” Of course, no one wanted to hear it.

For many years Love had worked in and managed a family business, a nursery that featured seasonal items at several retail outlets. His father built the business from nothing in the days before the big box stores. Now a department or home improvement store existed within a mile of each of Love’s Nursery locations. Robert and his brother had purchased the business from their father after years of haggling, and now he watched the revenues decline steadily. Dad still owned the real estate and talked about selling the land and buildings that housed the stores. He would make another killing. In the meantime, Love was navigating his way through the rocky road of the real estate business in an attempt to make up for his financial loss.

It was about nine-thirty, and he didn't have any pressing appointments. As he turned onto Wyoming Avenue, he remembered John's invitation. The State Room was just ahead. He decided to turn the corner. Sure enough, there was the pickup without a tailgate parked in the place it seemed to own. "*I could use a coffee,*" Love rationalized. He darted toward an opening along the curb.

The State Room was a humble diner that crowded the corner, in contradiction to what its name implied. It looked like a ranch home, and the screen in the storm door at the rear was ripped, an indication of what the visitor was about to encounter inside. Behind the diner on the dirty lot three Cadillacs were parked in a row in front of two stained garbage dumpsters. The pavement was broken and lay in rubble over muddied holes. The license plates read "Rakos1", then "Rakos2", and finally, "Rakos3." Love noticed that the number three car was a newer model. "*Guess the owners like Cadillacs,*" he told himself with a shrug. "*Guess I should be impressed.*"

The front looked much the same way, but was crowded with newspaper and sale flyer vending machines and racks. A recent edition of the Local Homes Magazine was lying on the cracked sidewalk, torn and flapping in the breeze. "*Now there's a buy,*" Love told himself as he

stepped over the photo and article depicting the feature home of the month. He had to chuckle to himself.

He reached for a flimsy aluminum storm door. The handle button was inoperable, but that didn't matter because the door was unlatched. The glass in the bottom panel was missing, allowing a clear view into the dark diner that appeared before him. It was noisy, but pleasant smells enticed Love into this unfamiliar territory, a strange den of humanity serving their basic needs. He noticed chrome pipes protruding from the floor with a circle top of red vinyl, broken on the edge above the tarnished metal rim. Some, unoccupied, were ripped across the top with a white material exposed. Other stools were lowered by the weight of breakfast patrons, mostly men, talking loudly at the same time. "Hey, what about that interception in the last thirty seconds?" a middle-aged man chided against his opposition. The man behind the counter wore a long white apron, covered with stains of many colors and held a grimy coffeepot in his hand. "Your Eagles never had a chance," he retorted in a loud but friendly tone as he filled the mug with stained fingerprints to the rim.

Love brushed past the backs of the regular morning crowd at the State Room, rounded a corner and faced a narrow hallway with crowded

booths on one side. On the other side there was a doorway without a door, allowing a view into the kitchen. He saw smoke rising from a long metal grill, eggs in the middle, but butter and grease along the cooking perimeter, and an orange to dark brown colored stain to the edges. At one end was a fryer with the basket submerged in bubbling grease that splattered onto the grill and the floor. The cook was unkempt, in street clothes, thin and bent toward the grill. His shoes were old work boots, battered and torn, hanging open at the ankles with the laces dangling their frayed edges toward the floor, vinyl tile with large black spots where the surface had been worn away. He looked like a street person, but seemed to conduct his duty with precision and accuracy.

Love peered down the aisle and saw two workmen at one booth and a man in a business suit at another. In the back of the restaurant there was a plate with half eaten food. It was sitting alone, in front of the bench that was anchored to the rear wall. Across from the doorway to the kitchen, was an empty booth. It contained a spoon, knife, and fork sitting on a place mat, made of crinkled paper with scalloped edges. The off-white mug with a large handle and permanent fingerprints sat upside down in front of the paper mat. He quickly sat down, before he realized the cushion was cracked open, exposing rough edges of vinyl and

crushed foam. He repositioned himself for relief from the discomfort he felt on his bottom side.

Wright was nowhere to be found. "*Maybe I should dust this place,*" Love asserted to himself. Instinctively he reached for the clear vinyl-covered menu that stood behind a sugar jar with a chrome top. The flap that was supposed to seal the sweetener in the jar was broken off.

The smells of breakfast drew his attention once again toward the kitchen. "*Just imagine what is lurking under the floor...*" Robert thought to himself. In his mind's eye he could see a shadow move quickly across the floor toward the base of the grill. Soon others followed. It wasn't long before he imagined that rats were crawling all over the grill and adjoining workspaces. They would be gone before 5 a.m., when the cook would return to scrape off the droppings, shards of food containers, and scraps of food. He would clear off the cooking surface with a curse under his breath. They were hungry and impatient, the patrons of the State Room, that is. All he ever heard were complaints. "My toast is too dark - the coffee is like tar. Are you serving yesterday's leftovers?" they would yell toward him. But he would keep to the grill, holding his back to the door. It was the owner's role to quiet the customers as he shouted out their favorites and banged the heavy dishes in front of them. He had the dirt on most of the locals, and they knew not to push the envelope, or

retaliation would be swift and harsh. They never knew who might be listening.

Love observed some awkward glances made toward him. He was someone new.

"Where did that thought come from?" he asked himself, but knew the answer. He was reminded of the times he would sneak to the roof of a shed at his childhood home, so he could watch the dog chained nearby. The pooch would get a large bowl of Purina Dog Chow, and seemed to eat better if it was soaked in water. The shepherd mix would take a few quick gulps, and then step back as the rats swarmed in. Perhaps it was better if none was left to spoil in the old pot that served as the dog's dish. It smelled rank within 24 hours, and if left to dry, it had to be chiseled off the pot, often resulting in more white enamel being chipped away.

"Coffee?" asked the gruff voice coming from above. "Yes, please," Love answered, sensing that his words were out of place. The man in the apron holding the dirty coffeepot stood still, and after what seemed like several minutes, sighed and blew through his teeth. He jerked his head toward the white mug that sat upside down in front of his patron. Robert quickly flipped it over, knocking over a clear glass salt shaker with a tarnished top, in the process. The coffee was poured from several feet above its intended target, splashing lightly on the table.

"What can I get ya, stranger?" he spoke again. Without lifting his eyes and without hesitation, Love ordered his favorite breakfast foods hoping to quickly regain his privacy - two eggs sunny side up, sausage, and potatoes.

Within minutes the owner returned and dropped the plate in front of Robert. The butter soaked toast half slid off. The food looked and smelled good. Love pierced a potato square with his bent fork first. It vented some steam. As he lifted it to his mouth it smelled like a peanut. It nearly burned his tongue and the salt aroused his taste glands immediately. As he closed his jaw, he felt the inner potato, hot and soft, squirt out of the soft shell created by the deep fryer. The sensation of this breakfast food was very pleasing. It was mostly sweet but bland as a vegetable should be, with a potato and peanut taste combined that was unmistakable. This is the way breakfast potatoes, call them what you like, home fries or hash browns, were supposed to be.

Next, with his senses aroused to a new height, Robert used his fork to cut off a piece of the sausage patty. It was nicely cooked, light brown and a bit crunchy, and a clear liquid oozed out, but it was not too greasy. It looked to be cooked all the way through. Again, his nose first caught the sensation and prepared his taste buds. It was meaty, sweet

and sour, with a fresh pork taste. And again, the side dish quickly had the approval of this eater.

Love was being pulled in, consumed by the pleasure of this food. He took a sip of coffee - smooth. He was suddenly unaware of his surroundings, of the man who just walked by and entered the booth in front of him. Nothing could disturb this moment of food heaven.

"Robert!! Is that you?" The greeting startled him and he jumped in his seat. Looking up he saw a familiar man with a broad grin on his face, and was suddenly brought back to the reality of the dingy diner with the great food. It took a moment for the recognition to register. John Wright had returned to his morning feast after a sudden bathroom urge.

"Oh, you're the guy from Sunday morning," Robert stammered, not weighing his words. "Yeah, John, right?" He began to regain his composure. "I decided to take you up on your invitation. Man... this food is so good!"

"Oh yeah, I'm a regular," John retorted. "I'm afraid it's beginning to show," he patted his belly. He picked up his plate and moved toward Robert's private space without permission. He waved his coffee mug in the air. "What did you think of church?"

"Well, I'm not really a regular there - I mean, I'm not religious,"

Love was quick to set the parameters of the talk. "But, you seem different."

"I'm not trying to impress anyone, not even God," Wright responded. "We're good."

Love began to recall the unfamiliar expressions of this stranger.

"So you're saying that God did not take the child's life, but that he is in control?"

Wright paused, lowering his head. As if tapping into a supernatural wisdom, he looked at Robert and spoke with calm and confidence. There was a sparkle in his eyes. "An angel was received into Heaven, and the Father was happy to welcome her. He knew she was coming, but the illness that took her earthly life would not have been of His will or favor. The child was a victim of the evil in our world, and was rescued by a loving God. She is in a better place. I really believe that."

Love felt some agitation with the answer that impressed him as being just a little too right.

"So what you're saying is that I am a victim, or not really in control of my life?" Love challenged. "Can you explain why I shouldn't want to help myself, especially if God won't help me?"

“You’re confused about the choices,” Wright offered with assurance. “People are confused and deceived about God. He is not a vindictive ruler that remains distant to us. He wants to be personal, and it is intimacy that the Creator desires.”

Wright continued, “People need to understand the choices they are making, and the significance of those choices. When it comes to spiritual things, most people don’t understand. The forces of evil are speaking to us, persuading us, and leading us into deception. But the person chooses to go there.”

“Isn’t it amazing,” Wright asked, “that the superpower can only persuade, and that the power of decision and action belongs to us? But,” he warned, “the power of evil is great, and it can only be overcome by the power of the Spirit of Jesus, loving, sacrificial, and resurrected almighty. We must solicit His power for our lives.”

Love looked at his cooling coffee and let loose on a long sigh drawn between his lips and exasperated toward Wright.

([deceived](#): Jam 1:16-17; Psa 139:17,18, 23, 24; 1Jo 4:16-19.

[Encourage](#) a friend.)

“Begin to understand that you must choose the Savior,” Wright said, “and that you need to be rescued from the power of sin, which you have been serving. Sin is very powerful, and that’s why so many people

are unable to control their desires and continue to suffer with addictions. Sin is empowered by evil. When a person chooses and accepts it, it has increasing influence on that person.”

He was determined to seize the moment to drive his point home. Wright continued, “In Thessalonians, Paul prayed for followers of Christ, that their whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless. This speaks to the power of sin on the components of our being. The spirit is a source outside our being, an energy that empowers and drives us, and it is immortal. This is our link or connection with spiritual forces, good or evil, God or Satan. It is evident in our physical life in our soul, which involves heart and mind, the seat of our appetites, desires, and lusts. The soul is where the rubber meets the road, or spirit affects this life. The soul is also immortal, and lives forever. Ultimately, it defines the person.”

“Hey, slow down,” Love inserted. “I’m not sure I buy all this religious jargon.”

“What I’m trying to say,” Wright asserted, “is that we need to understand it is the choices we make, either for or against God that really matter in our lives. We need to understand the choice.” He paused, sensing that he may have said too much, and not intending to be offensive to his new friend.

“So does God just sit back and take a passive role?” Love pondered.

“Yes, and no. We cannot understand His ways. I know that God’s heart is moved, and it stirs Him into action. He offers protection and puts restraints on Satan. When it comes to the personal level, He is either driven away, or increases in power. Think for a moment... what do you suppose is the result of God’s Presence increasing or decreasing in our lives?”

Love raised an eyebrow, but did not venture a verbal response.

“I think the scripture in Jeremiah about God leaving the temple is insightful. If people empower evil and deny God, He will withdraw.”

“So what about the innocent victims in earthquakes, or war?” Love demanded.

“See, that is the crux of it,” Wright replied. “You will blame God, and hold an offense against Him, but the most significant thing about that choice is that you are personally rebelling and siding with the accusation of evil. You bought into the propaganda, but don’t even fully know or understand what happened.”

Now he felt a little irritated as Love shifted in his seat.

“I don’t have all the answers,” Wright conceded. “I cannot perceive how to deal with nations. But I do believe that even in the

midst of tragedy, the Savior is a companion that protects and assists the child of God, manifesting power in his spirit and soul, or spiritual life, but also can and will intervene into the physical realm to prevent suffering. Ultimately, life is magnified in His presence.”

“Wow, what a perspective.” Love lifted his head to once again make eye contact with his mentor. Joy was dancing on the messenger’s face. “Where do you get this stuff?”

([blamed](#): Mat 11:5-6, 2Pe 3:9. [Encourage](#) a friend.)

Wright was chewing on his food and made no answer. “I wish God cared about me,” Love complained.

“But he does. God is always faithful, always true, always love. You have to choose Him, and can only do so by rejecting evil. Even serving selfish desire has been a choice for sin. You have to put God first in your life.”

“That’s not as easy as you imply,” Love said defensively.

“Talk to Him,” Wright encouraged. “God already knows, so intimacy comes with your truthful confession.” Wright paused. “He will help you know what you need to change. Are you willing?”

Love looked away as the words settled upon him like a weight.

“We all try to put God in a box,” Wright offered in reconciliation. “That’s such foolish religion. God is not controlled, or

contained. He sets the standard, not us. He is Holy, a Consuming Fire. We can only approach Him in truth in absolute humility.”

“Starting to sound a little scary,” Love reiterated.

“Well, some represent that consuming fire in judgement. I see it in the degree of intimacy He desires. Let me tell you, He is very intense on loving you.”

([desired](#): Zep 3:17, John 3:16 -17, 14:21: [Encourage](#) a friend.)

“So... according to Mr. Wright,” Robert used his name wittingly, feeling a bit audacious, “I’ve been deceived to believe that I am in control of my life and that it is OK?”

“Go on,” Wright urged.

“I’ve been influenced by evil to blame God, and turn away from Him. I may not worship Satan, but I am self-sufficient, and serve my own needs.”

“You are a quick learner.”

“And,” Love was now trying to impress. “I should humbly approach God, consider His way, and if I’m completely honest, He will be intimate with me.”

“Yes!” Wright announced. “Then the process of rejecting sin begins.”

“Oh yes,” Love was determined to have the last word, “I must make informed choices to have God’s Presence increase in my life.”

“Do you see your need for God?” Wright asked.

“I’ll think about it,” Love was not going to concede too much control at the moment.

Robert began eating a little faster. He suddenly wanted to leave the diner, but didn't want to sacrifice the delicious food in doing so. He stood, took a long sip of the luke warm coffee and bid his breakfast companion a good day.

Love shook his head as he sprinted to his car, parked around the corner. "*Wow, he's intense,*" he calmed himself. "*Guess I'll have to think about that!*"

3. Stephen –

A Memory for Understanding

There are certain events that happen to us during our lives that are too important to leave to happenchance. So what do we do after all is done that is possible for us to do? – we pray. The impending death of a child is such an event. However, years later the memory fades, and the deal we offered God is forgotten. Now... let us remember.

As Robert fumbled nervously for his car keys his phone began ringing. Why did it always ring at such an inconvenient time? He nearly dropped it as he pulled it from his pocket. He glanced at the screen, and immediately became even more annoyed. It was his "darling" wife. He thought about ignoring the call, but knew she would leave a disturbing voice mail message that would be almost meaningless, and then call again, repeatedly. Reluctantly, he pressed the answer button. "*Let's see*

what she has to complain about," he prepared himself. He almost felt an emotional overload, certainly a void for handling more criticism.

"Hello," he said half-heartedly in a low volume.

"Robert, why aren't you at the office?" Eve demanded. "I called and they said you weren't there."

She waited for a response that didn't come.

"Didn't you tell me that was where you were going?" she demanded. "I'm at work and I can't take these calls from your grandmother," she complained.

"Then why are you calling me now?" Love chided.

"I'm on break, and my head nurse is glaring at me right now."

Eve had worked part-time before their son Stephen was born. Then, with a baby, she worked per-diem, and the couple struggled to pay their health insurance bill. As Robert's income from the family business continued to dwindle, Eve eventually went back to work fulltime, under duress, very grudgingly, and with a constant protest.

Robert harbored a little resentment at being restricted by Stephen's nursery school schedule and all the time he spent babysitting, but knew he had little choice in the matter. They needed the bucks, and a nursing job achieved real money, versus the pretend money promised in real estate.

But Stephen was his only real joy in life, the son he waited many years for. As a couple, they had been infertile, then the Mrs. was finally diagnosed with advanced and severe endometriosis. She had three surgeries and was on a nearly constant regiment of fertility drugs. She was always moody, complained of pelvic pain, bloating and discomfort, and became very resentful of her shortcomings in life. Robert tried to stay optimistic, and was unable to unite with her in her place of remorse and discouragement. "*Life is what you make of it,*" he believed. He was determined to find opportunities in his life and pursue them. She showed little interest. The physical act of making a baby became a required chore, and both lost the pleasure of doing it. Their love for each other was waning and their relationship was changing.

The struggle permeated their relationship, and then began affecting others as Eve showed resentment to other young mothers even publicly; to those who had the great gift and blessing that she was denied. As a couple they were becoming known as those with a problem, and she resented the glances and shuns. They were not invited to children's events and reluctantly attended the parties for nieces and nephews. Eve would not be helped, and Robert began to find consolation in doing solo events, even if it was one as simple as attending a movie alone. His self-reliance would sustain him as he was

confronted with a loss of his own, the loss of his wife and companion, the loss of his hope for a caring relationship with another person who was committed to him, and really cared.

Eventually the fertilization treatment worked, and a pregnancy was declared. It was good and happy news for the couple who would have a child and gain the challenges and responsibilities of parenthood. But it was too late to revive their marriage, as the rejection each experienced from the other was too great to repair.

The days of Stephen's birth were happy days. The new Mom and Dad watched his every move, listened for his every cry, and celebrated his every achievement, even the first ounce of formula he consumed. They were happy with the first dirty diapers, and the evidence that their baby was healthy and whole. This was their greatest blessing.

Dr. Bob, their pediatrician, loved children. He would enter the exam room with an energy and exuberance that filled the room and demanded the child's attention. He was a middle-aged man, bald with long whips of a comb-over that frequently left its intended place and fell down over his left eye. He was a bit unkempt. His pants hung low in the rear and his shirt was partly hanging out. His shoes were simple and badly scuffed though mostly concealed by the pant legs that bagged on

top of them. The back edges of his trousers were dirty from being shuffled on the floor. If he was doctoring for money, his success was not evident.

His office was located in the hill section of a city that was once a prominent coal strip-mining town. It had seen better days. The brick houses with large front lawns in the north end had survived the years, but still showed signs of age and neglect around the windows and roof, and at the garage and driveway. Often, the landscape was overgrown and hacked away unappreciatively. The city had a population that was changing rapidly. Its mayor was vocal against the hiring of illegal immigrants, drew national attention to his cause, and eventually went to Congress where he had a very unremarkable term. Hispanics were the majority of the patients Dr. Bob served.

Although Dr. Bob's office lacked the professional and sterile feeling that would inspire confidence, he over compensated with his obvious affection for the children in his care. It was his goal to get the child's attention and maybe a laugh as he entered the exam room. In his shirt pocket was a toy that he chose to entertain with. The doctor liked finger puppets, and clocks with moving pendulums. If the toy didn't garner the child's gaze, Dr. Bob would make faces and sounds, and finally offer his exam tools, which almost always worked for getting the

child's attention. They loved the penlight and would grab hold of the stethoscope. The doctor knew the game well. The child would first tap it and then speak into the sensor, finally yelling, as the intensity of the noise would cause the doctor to fall off his stool. Then, the tyke would have a turn at listening. Dr. Bob would carefully place the earpieces and gently blow or whisper into the other end. This always produced a smile.

He led the parents to believe that his playtime was an IQ test of sorts, and always noted the child's inquisitive response. "Oh, he is very bright," the doctor would say. "Did you see the way he followed that?" Of course, the exam was integrated into the playtime. Dr. Bob was not rushed. After being satisfied with the exam, he would turn his attention to the parents and patiently answer all their questions, as he explained the child's stage of development and offered advice on what to expect next.

"Anytime, you can bring him to my house," Dr. Bob would say. "He is very smart. I would enjoy playing with him." Then the doctor offered his good-byes before sending in the nurse to deliver the trauma of an immunization injection. Always, he looked in the child's eyes and said, "I love you," then kissed the top of the head.

Robert returned to the waiting area as Stephen's mom attempted to calm their baby and made hasty preparations for departure. He looked at the broken and smudged toys. He saw the dirty carpet. Other children

who had been waiting through Stephen's playtime and exam seemed tired of the room and its contents as they coughed openly. "*How can you come here without getting a bug,*" Robert wondered to himself. But any thoughts or nagging suggestions of finding an office that felt germ free was quickly banished by the recent memory of the humble doctor and his genuine expression of affection for his child. "*This guy really cares,*" he assured himself. "*I know that I can trust him.*"

It was a cold day in February as Stephen lie in his crib, beginning to finally quiet down. It had been a difficult couple of days with a fussy baby. He had a runny nose and soon was coughing. It was intermittent at first but then became nearly constant. He had a low-grade fever. By day three of exhibiting the cold symptoms, Stephen was crying less, but also not eating or showing any interest in his surroundings.

Robert and Eve stood at the side of the baby's bed watching intently. "Either he's getting better, or he just got much worse," the father said. "What do you think?"

Eve's experience as a registered nurse was with surgical patients, and she had never worked in pediatrics. "Maybe he is having trouble breathing," she warned. "Should I call the doctor?"

"I'm not sure," Robert answered. "Maybe we should wait awhile?"

"His respiration seems shallow," the concerned mother asserted. "I'm calling now."

Robert watched longer, and decided that the child's appearance did not resemble an expression of health. He felt fear welling up inside. He silently said a prayer, "*Oh God, please help him and watch over him.*"

A few minutes passed as he could hear Eve speaking on the telephone in the other room. Finally, the conversation ended. She returned.

"She said that we should give him Children's Tylenol, and call back if he gets a fever."

"He already has a fever," the father replied, becoming agitated. "What sense does that make? Did you ask to talk to the doctor?"

"She wouldn't let me," Eve countered defensively as she raised her voice.

"Call her back," Robert ordered in a demanding tone. "This is ridiculous! Tell her that you are a nurse. Your baby is sick and you think he needs to be seen by a doctor. Tell her that he has a fever, for days, and we are concerned."

"What if she tells me the same thing?" Eve asked.

"Get her name," he commanded. "Tell her that if she denies our baby medical attention and he is harmed by an illness, that we will hold her responsible." Robert was feeling his gusto, a need to protect his son.

Eve went to the other room, but quickly returned.

"Well?" Robert demanded.

"Let's go. We're in."

It was late in the afternoon by the time they arrived at Doctor Bob's office and they ran in to find only one other parent and child waiting in the outside area. Fortunately, it was a short time until they were called into an exam room.

Doctor Bob had an unusually serious expression as he entered the exam room and quickly garnered the information needed for a diagnosis. How long was he sick, what was his temperature, etc. Eve said, "I'm not a pediatric nurse, but I think his respiration is slowing."

The doctor listened closely with his stethoscope. There was no gesture toward his usual playtime. Stephen now seemed lethargic.

Doctor Bob quickly drew some blood from the baby's fingertip with no objection from the child and left the room.

He returned moments later. "I think your little guy needs some extra help," he said cautiously, as to not alarm the mother who was

already very nervous about the situation at hand. "His oxygen level is declining."

Both parents returned an uncomfortable and scared expression.

"He needs oxygen, but I can't give it here," Doctor Bob quickly said, anticipating their question. "I think we should get him to a hospital as soon as possible. Where would you like him to go?"

Now feeling fear and remorse, the parents shared a questioning glance. "We're with Saint Luke's," Eve answered.

"There are two nearby," the doctor replied. "Which one would you prefer?"

Eve chose the larger hospital with the children's wing after a brief consultation, even though it was a bit further away. Doctor Bob quickly left his office to instruct his nurse to call the hospital and alert them for the incoming patient.

"He needs oxygen as soon as possible," Doctor Bob noted upon returning. "I'd call an ambulance, but it could take twenty minutes for them to get a crew together and come here," he explained.

"I think I can get to the hospital in thirty minutes, or less," Robert countered. "But will they have oxygen on the ambulance?" he asked.

"Not necessarily," Doctor Bob confessed. "It depends on the crew they get."

"I'll take him," the father quickly concluded. "I don't want to wait and be disappointed."

"Go!" the doctor said with increasing concern.

Eve sat in the back alongside the baby seat. Robert sped out of the parking lot and headed into the passing lane. It was a short link on a bypass to connect to the interstate highway. "*Lord, help us,*" he prayed.

He pushed the button for the four-way flashers and pressed hard on the accelerator. The car launched forward in response. Robert was pushing it for all it was worth, despite its 70,000 miles and six years. Soon he was up to eighty miles per hour and flying by the cars in the other lane.

"What if you get pulled over for speeding?" Eve inquired.

"Don't care," Robert answered. "I'm not stopping. They can chase as a police escort."

"Please be careful," she pleaded. But Robert's gaze was intent and his concentration obvious as he tried to anticipate the next move of the driver in his pathway. He was aggressive, but defensive at the same time, a tactic he had learned in training for his motorcycle license.

As they approached town he slowed some, but ran a red light after checking for oncoming cars. They approached the Emergency Room and darted inside with the sleeping baby. Eve looked at the child and wondered if he was still conscious.

A nurse directed them down another hall. It was a sprint to the finish. They threw open a door and jumped inside the treatment center. The nurse there looked startled. "Is this the baby they said was coming?" she seemed surprised. "I didn't expect you so soon."

"Where's the doctor?" the father asked with concern. "Let's get going on this!" he demanded.

The diagnosis was respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), a disease that was attacking the lungs, with potentially serious ramifications. Stephen was placed in a tent with oxygen tubes in his nose. A nurse visited frequently to suction out the mucus that was accumulating in his airways, nose and throat. There was no immediate cure, no medication that would eradicate the virus. The parents were told that a strong antibiotic may help his recovery, but it was used only in the worst cases. The boy may be asthmatic as a result. Because of his fragile age, other problems could also develop. Eve had heard of the worst cases, and pronounced a warning of doom, as she often did based on her hospital experiences.

Robert and Eve spent the next 48 hours by their son's side, watching intently and praying. *“Please God, save him,”* Robert pleaded. *“Please God, let me take my son home healthy. I will give to others and help the church, but please God, heal this baby boy!”*

Finally, there were signs of improvement. This child that they had waited for, even struggled for, for so long - he would not be taken from them.

One day in the present, all alone with his thoughts, Robert wondered if God had intervened to save his son from the clutches of evil. He recalled his son's illness as an infant and pondered the real threat it brought to him. Why was his child spared? His faith was weak, even faint, but a seed of believing, or more so - hoping, had sprouted in his heart. He said a prayer of thanksgiving to show God his appreciation. He understood now that life was indeed fragile. He had little or no control over such circumstances. "*Perhaps we are victims, or benefactors, depending on the perspective,*" he thought. More questions crowded into his mind. Did he and his family need God's protection each day?

There were no guarantees. Nothing should be taken for granted!

He thought about his new friend, John Wright, and understood slightly more, his insights. Perhaps, they could meet again. Maybe it should be soon.

4. Lunch -

The Deception Exposed

The memories of his grandmother's death came on days that he was feeling disturbed about the many complexities of his life. They were unwanted, unappreciated, and still unresolved. These were the hauntings of recent times and they seemed to crowd into his mind more frequently during the past week. His spirit was not peaceful, even agitated.

Eve had been more disagreeable than usual. Was it because of her work? Yes, of course, it was always because of her work. Love had grown weary of constantly being badgered about it. He had asked, then politely pleaded that she leaves the problems of work there, when she exited the hospital. But it seemed that Eve found pleasure in clubbing him with her complaints. She was unhappy. Although she never chided Robert to be a failure, she made him feel that way. These were difficult

times for Robert as an income producer, but his previous successes and achievements still could not be totally discounted. Love felt unfulfilled in his increasing role as "Mr. Mom" for Stephen. As both adults harbored their grudges, there was little to no sympathy between Eve and Robert, and virtually no meaningful conversation. They were not only drifting farther apart, but many times purposely sought a separation between themselves, wanting to avoid the other, hoping to maintain a peace, or more accurately, desiring to avoid a dispute in this growing unrest.

Stephen was the bond that kept them together, but Love wondered if the fighting and discontent always evident in their home was hurting him, in ways the child couldn't understand, even causing his negative behavior. Stephen's parents had reasoned that the only-child needed to be with other children for socialization. Besides, the only time Robert could serve a real estate client was while Stephen was in daycare, or after Eve had returned home from work. Her return time always varied, and Robert could not depend on it, so he had to pick up Stephen at the end of his daycare session. It seemed that Eve kept coming home later and later. Robert had difficulty in scheduling appointments for clients.

Today Eve was off of work and relishing the time scheduled to be home alone after dropping Stephen off at the "Noah's Ark" daycare center. Robert headed to the real estate office but dreaded the facade he'd have to exhibit. He heard a tone from his cell phone and reached for it despite the promise he made to himself not to use it while driving. A year earlier he had been in an auto accident while looking at his phone. He had refused to admit the cause of the accident. The phone was new then, and he lost a message by pressing the wrong button. Annoyed, and determined to overcome his technical inability, he quickly selected more options. How many seconds, or minutes, passed before the crash is unknown. He had driven under a red traffic light and into the pathway of a car coming quickly down the hill, on the intersecting road, to his right. They collided in the intersection. Robert was stunned. He threw his phone on the car's floor. He had made a bad mistake.

Most of the damage was to the front of Robert's car, one he purchased new the year before. The other car was smashed in its rear quarter on the driver's side. It was fortunate that he had not struck the driver's door, as this could have resulted in a serious injury. As Robert surveyed the damage, he saw his young son, still strapped in his car seat, in the rear, passenger side. What if the collision had been a fraction of a second later and Love's vehicle had been in front of the oncoming car? It

may have struck the side of Robert's car where Stephen was anchored. The thought of the near miss and possible tragedy had shook Love to the core.

While driving, he was distracted by his phone once again. It seemed that something kept pulling him down, and his life was becoming more reckless and less secure. Love sometimes wondered secretly to himself if he was hurting others, those he cared deeply about, despite he and Eve's futile attempts at a peace in coping with their differences and difficulties.

The text message on the phone simply said, "Lunch?" Love rounded a corner and dropped the phone on the passenger seat. Who was inviting him to lunch? He did not recognize the number. Then, there was another tone. Love reached for the phone despite the increasing traffic. Drivers were darting between lanes as they sought the correct position for the turn they needed to make at the next traffic light,. He glanced at it quickly. "State Room. Great Burger." A driver sounded his horn and made a gesture as he cut in front of Love, who stomped on his brake pedal. "*It must be John Wright,*" Love remembered. "*Yeah, why not!*" he responded to himself and hit the turning signal.

Robert began to recall their previous conversation. It ended abruptly, and he had wondered if he would see Wright again. "*Don't*

blame God.... Evil is influencing us," Love recalled. *"I wonder what he will have to say today?"*

Love's mind began to drift and feelings flooded in. His emotions were a bit raw. He recalled the neglect and abuse his grandmother suffered and still felt a tinge of the raging anger that had finally settled into a disturbing disappointment. He often expressed the convictions he carried, but no one else seemed to share his sentiments, or care about his concern. He felt loneliness in his separation from his married partner, and was genuinely disappointed in the failures of his marriage. There was no where else to go, and he desired no other relationship which he knew would only bring more trouble than good.

His phone rang loudly, and jarred him back to reality. The sky was gray and a sprinkle appeared on his windshield. It mixed with the dust of the anti-skid propelled into the air from the broken-down dump truck he was following, which scarped the edge of the dirty street. Everything, even the environment, was dingy and dismal.

Eve's name was on the phone that continued to produce a nerve-jarring ring. Robert hit the brake and darted into an empty parking spot along the street. This call would require his full attention, no doubt.

"Hello," he said in a weak tone, intended to communicate his lack of luster for the call.

"Robert, they said he can't stay!" Eve was shouting in distress.

Love wondered why she would never attempt, even slightly, to speak in a way that he could understand her demands. "Who said what?" he replied.

"It's Stephen. They said he is bad," the distressed mother relented. "Someone has to go and get him."

"Come on, Eve," Robert began to get agitated. "Tell me who said what. How am I supposed to know what you are talking about."

"Mrs. Spence said he is bad. She left a nasty message on my phone. He can't stay. What are we going to do now?" Eve demanded.

"He's not a bad kid," Robert defended his son and his parenting skills. "Come on Eve! Do you think it is right for them to put a label on a three-year-old?"

"Well they are, and they want him out. So what are you going to do about it?" she pressed deeper into the father's defenses. She was unwilling to agree or make any concession to her feelings of personal distress.

"OK, lets just try to relax," Robert changed his strategy.

Mrs. Spence had sent an official looking complaint home during the previous week that required the reluctant parents' signatures, and

even worse, demanded a parent conference. Eve was visibly shaken. Robert was mostly annoyed, and said the school was exaggerating the problem because they only wanted kids that were easy to manage - they wanted to make their job less difficult.

Mrs. Spence was not at all sympathetic as she described Stephen's shortcomings. He refused to follow instructions. He became angry with other children and would not share his toys. He would not sit still for story time, and refused to cooperate during lessons for counting.

Robert had decided prior to the dreaded meeting to be agreeable and to request her expertise in resolving the situation. There was nothing worse than a defensive parent, who insisted that his child could do no wrong. This is what she will expect, he reasoned, so he planned to play along, intending to appease her. After all, other daycares were full, and it would be detrimental to Stephen to move him to a new facility. And, there would be the additional cost. Robert felt a bit of resentment toward the program they insisted that the parents purchase. It had to be full time. They had only one vacation day, and had to pay regardless of their son's attendance. It all seemed like a big rip-off to him.

To Robert's surprise, the child educator, the authority on child behavior, had no suggestions and put the burden of resolving the problem squarely on the parents. Eve squirmed and began her "poor me" routine.

She blamed her work schedule and the impossible demands on her time. She insisted that they were good parents.

Robert's mind was racing. He had to come up with something, and do it quickly. As he toned out the conversation between Eve and Mrs. Spence, he came upon an idea. Thank goodness. Eve's plea for sympathy was falling on the deaf ears of a callous and uncaring person.

Robert recalled his tactic of keeping Stephen in his high chair for longer periods of time as the boy watched TV. This kept the toddler contained and Robert was able to achieve more. He suggested that Mrs. Spence do the same.

She paused as she reflected on the suggestion. But they didn't have a high chair at the school. Other children did not require one. So Robert volunteered to bring in a high chair for Stephen, and everyone agreed to test the new procedure. At the time, Robert felt he had dodged the bullet, but now that their tempers were flaring it seemed as though the doom of daycare was about to explode in his face.

"Everyone needs to cool down," Robert challenged Eve again.
"Just go and get him, but don't say anything."

"I can't do it," Eve protested. "I don't want to face that evil woman," she was beginning to vent her feelings. "I just might lose it and tell her off."

"Well I can't," Robert countered quickly. "I have appointments." He paused as he considered the exaggeration, a half-truth. "When do you have to be there?" he asked as he began to sense a plan coming to mind.

"Now!" Eve shouted. "They want him out of there now!"

"Tough," Robert felt his defenses rising. "We paid for the day. They can just relax too." He paused and was surprised that silence had found a temporary place at the other end of the connection. "How do they even know that you got the message, or that you are home?" he was thinking out loud and surprised himself with his wit. "Wait until four," he instructed with a determined purpose. "By then Spence will be gone for the day. Go in and pick him up like nothing ever happened. You don't have to talk to anyone."

"So, it's all on me?" Eve was angered by Robert's suggestion.

"Come on," he searched for words but heard a click and realized that she had hung up. Such behavior was typical during a disagreement and Robert was neither surprised nor stirred by it, but relieved that the unpleasant encounter had finally ended.

"*Damn it!*" he cursed to himself out loud and stomped on the accelerator. A front wheel spun in the salt and cinders and spewed some dirt onto the sidewalk, even as Love's anger spilled over. Before he was really aware of his surroundings, he suddenly noticed the sign for Wyoming Avenue. He turned abruptly, still feeling the distress of Eve's call, and saw the State Room ahead. He parked the car, slammed the door, and paused to gather himself. Standing there he wondered if anyone had observed his distressed behavior. He looked around and saw no one. "*Damn her,*" he proclaimed the words in condemnation, but spoke in a softer tone as he kicked at a crumpled can laying discarded as trash near the curb. He was feeling some resolve. A whiff of fresh cut french-fries caught his attention and the smell lingered in his nostrils. His stomach growled. "*The hell with them all,*" he was now muttering to himself. He turned and stumbled on the broken sidewalk, nearly falling headlong for sure humiliation but caught himself and regained his balance in the nick of time. He wondered if he could regain his composure and if he was in the mood for Wright. But, it was too late to retreat.

Inside the dingy diner patrons were shouting and laughing. Love felt some immediate relief. He looked past the counter crowded with bar

stools, as he glanced over the faces in search of one familiar to him. He moved quickly, not wanting to offend them. The place was familiar, and Robert felt a sense of belonging, even fitting in. He turned the corner and started down the aisle to the place where he last met Wright. Yes, there he was in the booth at the rear of the diner. He was holding a large bun and seemed entranced by its pleasures. Ketchup and grease were dripping from the side opposite of his mouth.

"Robert!" he lowered his burger. "Glad you came," Wright said in greeting.

"Anywhere but home," Love surprised himself with his suggestion.

"Trouble in paradise?" Wright asked, not expecting an answer.

"Just the same old things," Robert muttered, hoping to change the direction of the conversation. "How's your day going?" he asked.

"God is good... all the time," Wright countered. "Sit down, relax, and enjoy a burger. They're great, especially the bacon - cheddar." He waved to get the waiter's attention.

Love ordered the same as his friend, the colossal burger with all the dressings. He upped one on Wright with an order of cheese fries and a side of gravy. Robert felt like indulging his emotional need, and was not feeling bashful about the other's presence.

"Good choice," John approved.

"My son is in trouble at school, my wife is upset, and somehow it's all my fault," Robert blurted toward John. He wanted to establish his right to disgust before Wright began expressing what seemed like self-righteousness.

"Sorry my friend," John was sincere in sympathy. "Life is hard at times. I hope your family is OK."

"Oh yeah, they're fine," Love corrected. "We will manage." He paused. "I'm not going to over-react." He paused again and Wright made no reply. "I guess that today is a little dark," he said, surprising himself at his display of honesty. "This weather really sucks!" he said, trying to dodge the exposure of his feelings.

Wright took another bite of his burger, raised his eyebrows, and peered deep into Robert's soul.

Love wondered how he managed to do so, and immediately felt uncomfortable. He dipped a couple of fries into the soft cheese that had run to the edge of the plate and then stuck them into the gravy, forcing the grease that floated on top down into the inviting mix.

John spoke next. "What's really bothering you, my friend?" he asked cautiously. Love meant to take offense at the suggestion, but was softened by the sincerity of John's voice, and gaze.

"Guess it's a little bit of everything," Robert replied, intending not to divulge his secrets. But the answer felt insufficient, so he continued. "No one is happy, or satisfied, for that matter," he admitted. "Seems I can't make things right."

Wright's response was a challenge that surprised Robert. "We must learn to be content, despite our circumstances," he said. The words seemed critical and harsh.

Love choked on his diet Coke. He was a bit taken at the statement. He coughed repeatedly.

Once he cleared his throat, Robert found his voice to be weak and shallow. "How can I do that?" he almost wheezed. "Everyone is angry and they keep demanding more from me."

Wright was focusing on his fries. He seemed to be intentionally giving Love some privacy, the chance to regain his composure without any compromise of dignity.

There was a long silence as both looked at their plates. Finally, Wright reached for his glass of water, and their eyes met once more. He took a sip, and slowly nodded in recognition, or more so, in appreciation of his lunch partner.

He sat down his glass and sighed slowly. During the next pause Love began to wonder if his friend was lacking for words, or was he

going to change the topic of their discussion. He sensed that John was about to admit to something important.

"I believe that what you are experiencing is a holy discontent," Wright said.

"What do you mean?" asked Love, feeling a bit offended at the suggestion, despite his own admittance.

"It is God's Holy Spirit that works as a Counselor to show us truth, God's way, and then to convict us of our selfish choices." John paused to see if Robert would accept the challenge. Then he added, "This is referred to most people as 'conscience,' but it's more than that."

Love quickly bit at his burger, feeling the need to occupy his hands and mouth. The words echoed in his brain as he pondered about them and wondered how to respond.

Before Robert could speak, Wright continued, "God is holy and pure. He will not be compromised," he appeared to be on a roll. "We must understand that we have rejected and rebelled against Him, the Creator of light, love, and life. We have lied to Him and spoken against Him, even trying to discredit Him. Yes, we have hurt Him." Wright paused for effect. "It is our rejection of Him that causes our life to be miserable. We have a false confidence. Life doesn't work without God.

We may choose to believe the lie of personal success and wealth, but it will eventually fail us completely."

Robert was feeling the need for a scapegoat, and quickly suggested one. "Then why are others so confident in the world's way... in their success?" he countered. "They seem to be content," he paused, "even happy!" Love challenged.

([rejected](#): Jer 28:16, Mat 12:37, Joh 3:18, Gal 6:7. [Encourage](#) a friend.)

"They are eventually consumed by pride," Wright answered. "And those who are not yet self-sufficient in pride, they go to the doctor for help and end up in a medication induced complacency. Do you call that contentment?" he asked, not seeking an answer.

Robert was a bit surprised by the suggestion.

Wright continued to emphasize his point. "Do you want to be healed, or to just treat symptoms?" He posed the question with an authority that stung. "Do you want to rely on a pill to feel better for the rest of your life?" he persisted. "Do you want to become a person who loses his passion for life and joins the ranks of those who stop feeling emotion or having deeper thought?"

"I think you made your point," Robert quickly interjected, showing a little agitation. "I'm not on any medication. I have full control."

John smiled broadly and offered a sincere apology. "Sorry, Robert. Don't take my words personally. I'm just burdened for the plight of our fellow man."

Both men seemed to relax a little. Despite the discomfort he felt, Robert also was determined to finish his burger and fries. The food was too good to waste.

"So many people are medicated," Wright lamented. "They're losing touch with the realities and challenges of their lives. But wonder is the avenue of excitement in life," he declared, his challenging tone softening.

Continuing to focus on his food, Robert wondered to himself, "*Is it true? Is everyone like a walking zombie... the living dead?*"

Wright nearly answered the question posed in Robert's mind. "They lose their zest for life. They have a crushed spirit. But God has more for you," he said.

Still not speaking to Wright, Love considered his own thoughts. "*Religion won't help me,*" he told himself. "*Why should I care about what God thinks?*"

John had taken a bite of his burger and seemed to smile, even as he chewed his food. Robert welcomed the break. "*But maybe, this is what I need, what I have been missing - even searching for?*" he wondered.

"Now that the deceptions of your life are exposed, you are discontent with the status quo," Wright offered, and circled back to his original point. "Not only are you held captive by evil, but a ransom is required for your release."

"A ransom? Have I been kidnapped?" Robert asked mostly to himself, and then coughed uncontrollably, spewing some chewed food toward Wright. Suddenly he felt the courage and urgency to speak once more.

"Excuse me, but slow down," Robert urged. "My parents are good Christians, I was baptized into the church, and I believe in God."

"But has the Spirit of God been born in you?" Wright asked. "If so," he explained, "you are changed from the inside out and have become a child of God, a member of His family. It's not religion, or church," he countered. "It's relationship."

"You know about Jesus," John explained. "He is the ransom. God's Son came to cancel religion and establish relationship. You will

find God in religion, but you won't find religion in God once you get to know Him better."

([ransomed](#): Job 33:24, Mar 10:45, Isa 53:5-6, 1Jo 2:2, Joh 8:34-36. [Encourage](#) a friend.)

Love was just beginning to understand when Wright offered more insight.

"Most people think that religion is faith. It is not enough just to believe."

"But have you accepted Jesus' sacrifice?" Wright asked. "Have you made Him the Lord of your life? Are you willing to repent of selfish living and serve Him? His way is true love and sacrifice."

Robert swallowed hard, realizing that his response to the challenge had failed utterly. His confidence diminished, he felt buried by the onslaught of questions that came in rapid fire. Love felt selfish and a little bit ashamed.

"God is Love. He wants to save you from the despair of this world," Wright offered. He seemed to be coming to the climax of his remarks. "Jesus sacrificed His life for you. He suffered and died for you, Robert Love. Now the Heavenly Father wants to welcome you home. In His forgiveness you will find rest, wholeness, and healing for

your heart and soul. Ask for His forgiveness. Doing so generates a new spirit and exuberance for life within you."

Wright's words were heard with clarity and caused Robert's mind to reel in response. *"Could it be... is there more to life than pleasure?"* he wondered. *"Why is happiness fleeting and harder to find recently? Maybe, just maybe, there is a God who really cares, who values every life, even mine?"*

The thoughts continued to come, like a bolt of lightning piercing the darkness of the night storm. *"How could He accept me, after all I've said to reject, even despise Him? I mean wow, I have accused Him of being the offender, the one guilty in all things that go wrong. Wow, I've been really rotten."*

"He wants to forgive you," Wright said, as if on cue. "God wants to have a relationship with you, to be a real and vital part of your life. Let godly sorrow lead you to repentance and a new life as you accept the sacrificial love of the Lord."

"OK," Love said, standing to his feet. Suddenly and urgently, it was time to go. "Hey, thanks, but I really have to get going."

"Sure, I understand," Wright said in goodbye. "Take care, my friend."

([repentance](#): 2Co.7:10. [Encourage](#) a friend.)

5. Gram –

Despairing in His Grandmother's Death

It is the most difficult decisions that haunt us in the future.

Caught between that proverbial “rock and hard place,” the final decision is often a compromise of what we truly long to do. Yes, hindsight is twenty-twenty, revealing with frequent cruelty the foolishness of those troubling times and the actions we now become accountable to, if only in our disturbed conscience.

Robert Love continued to struggle with the problems resulting from his job that produced little income, the shallow and unfulfilling relationship he had with his wife, the challenge of parenting a strong willed boy, and his personal failures. Most often his mind was occupied with thoughts of the terrible disappointments from his past, the times that others had been traitors to the goodness he wanted and needed to believe in. Now living with discouragement as a constant companion, the

troubling facts of the death of his grandmother seemed to be relentless in tormenting his mind and soul. He felt responsible for not doing more to help her.

Only one person seemed to really care, but even the spiritual admonitions of his friend, John Wright, recently felt like harsh criticisms. Despite the recent insights of God's mercy revealed in his life experiences, Love was not ready to accept grace for his future, but instead chose to pursue answers for the injustices of his past, wallowing in remorse. The trouble was, he didn't know how to find the compensation needed to make things right. His personal despair represented a problem that was much bigger than he was capable of solving. He felt the loss of Gram, and wondered why he had to know so much about the circumstances of her death, a situation that others doubted as really true. He couldn't seem to forget or let go of the specific memories of her demise. He considered it an untimely death. Love had known her in her waning years, unaware that her time would be cut short, even snuffed away like the smoke of an extinguished candle.

Following her hospitalization, Gram was not returned to the group home where she had resided, as she now required nursing care. Upon visiting her at her new place of residence, the Loves, Robert and

Eve, were at the same time pleased and troubled at their findings. There were many decrepit souls housed there. Everyone was acquainted with death, almost a daily occurrence there. Gram was still very weak. Supports held her upright when placed in a chair for feeding. A member of the nursing staff would hand-feed her, coaxing her for every bite of food she consumed. But it seemed that Gram was receiving good care, and within a short time, repeated visits established her progress and significant recovery.

Typically it was by voicemail that Robert was notified of family gatherings that requested and sometimes required his presence. He was surprised to learn of a party planned for his grandmother, to honor her on her 90th birthday. He wondered who would come since few in the family associated with her. Even more intriguing were the questions about who had planned the party and why they did so. Would her second family, the daughters from her second marriage, finally be introduced to her original family? In his thinking the party seemed inappropriate in light of the tensions that existed between her offspring: three children and twelve grandchildren from her first marriage, then two children and three grandchildren from her second. The two families never became acquainted and certainly never accepted each other. Their intolerance and dislike for each other reminded Robert of the foul smelling stench of

rotten vegetables. A veil of rejection divided this woman's loyalty and natural affection to offspring, and none of her children or grandchildren felt fulfilled in their relationship with her. Robert was dreading the gathering of superficial relatives. He would have to attend without Eve who was scheduled to work that Sunday, and the thought of doing so caused some additional anxiety. Eve was a welcome distraction at family gatherings.

As he walked into the nursing home, the sun shone brightly and warmed the earth on that spring afternoon. Stephen was in tow, holding his father's hand. The few others willing to attend for Gram had already gathered in her room.

She was propped up in her bed, leaning on a stack of pillows, and smiled broadly. Her energy and vitality had returned. Everyone shared pleasant greetings. Her caretakers, his half-relatives, were not present, but two cousins he had not seen for many years crowded against the side of the room. Upon seeing them Robert felt uneasy, and redirected his steps to the other side of Gram's bed. He felt some resentment of their rejection of his grandmother, despite their willingness to be present now.

Robert's parents, sensing the tension, quickly interceded with greetings intended to prevent discomforts. This was to be a happy time.

It was easy to divert attention to Stephen, the only child present. He went to his Nana and hugged her leg, seeking his own place of solace.

There was a large and beautiful bouquet of flowers on the table near Gram's bed. Someone in the group began to pose for photos. Relatives leaned against the bed, reaching for the elderly woman in embrace, and everyone offered a Hollywood style smile. It seemed a little overdone to Robert. The pretending created an atmosphere that was surreal, inappropriate to the reality of this partial gathering of a family which now included only a few of those who had been unwilling during the last decades to associate with a woman who had a lifetime ago abandoned them. Robert wondered if the photos being taken were for his grandmother's benefit, or for those who acted the part of a loving grandson, granddaughter, or married-to. Soon he was summoned and posed on one side with his father on the other. The Love men made a good photo for future posterity in preserving a positive family legacy, hugging their elderly mother and grandmother. This photo had the potential to be an heirloom. Soon Stephen was placed on the bed, but he quickly objected to the facade.

A small cake was brought in and Gram heartily blew out the single candle. It was quickly rushed away not to be seen again, after a quick snapshot. Robert had managed a half-hearted greeting to his

relatives. Complaints of the abuse she had suffered at the group home dominated his thoughts and a question nearly formed on his lips. But he squelched the words that would irritate and instead paid his respect, acknowledging them with a question that desired no answer. Robert knew the drill and also realized that others were watching to see if he would do what was required to be respectful. His performance would be judged by them, and reviewed later in their conversations to each other. But really, who cared? This day was for Gram, and this dysfunctional family was capable of the role playing required. And actually, the birthday girl of 90 years seemed to genuinely enjoy the recognition she received at her little party. This was the first time that so many of her family had gathered together, in her presence, in too many years to account for. Was her desire, even her dream of being forgiven and accepted, finally coming true?

With only a brief intermission from the greetings, insincere good-byes began, required before someone would feel a need to speak truthfully, or pose an insightful question that may be perceived as criticism or a challenge. And the offensive comment could easily be a slip, since controversies consumed everyone's thoughts. Who was responsible for Gram and her expenses, and should more of her family assist with her care? The question was on everyone's mind and each was

determined to avoid any direct accountability in answering it. They maintained a safe distance. Everyone knew that unpleasant conversation could be stirred by a lull in activity that would allow an expression of the reality of the relationships. This party moved quickly for another reason, an excuse that was welcomed. Gram was still weak and needed to rest.

Footsteps echoed in the hallway as an announcement of the aide who was coming to bring Gram her medication. It would lure her into a place of dreams, and a void of reality.

The intent of this gathering seemed evident to Robert. He perceived that it was for the creation of a memory, documented by photos, to appease the consciences of those who suffered from the familial voids of the past. But he wondered if the invitation was intended to make him and others accountable, or feel responsible, for his grandmother's needs.

Gram's daughters from her second marriage, Jennie and Patty, had not attended the gathering. They supervised Gram's care and had to be aware of the party. Robert wondered if they approved of it, or were part of making the arrangements. What he did not know or suspect was the gathering's other purpose, one of conclusion with shallow dignity, intended by the persons who knew of the plans they had made for this elderly woman.

Gram had become an unwelcome consumer. The services she required were costly. Her savings had been depleted, her estate had been exhausted, and now her unwilling caretakers, the daughters from her second marriage largely unknown to her other children, were confronted with the high cost of their mother's nursing care. This was an expense they were unable to bear. No one else was stepping up to help. But all of this was unspoken, at the present, and Robert, despite his suspicions and questions, still could not imagine the fate that would soon befall his grandmother. His silence and unwillingness to get involved was the decision he later came to regret. The accusation of not caring had become a scar that continued to infect the heart wound resulting from his inability to have peaceful resolution about immediate relatives who had recently died.

Ten days passed and Love was getting ready to go for Stephen who was at daycare. The rear door at the center, a church building, opened exactly at 2:15 PM. Although the children were not visible to those waiting outside, a woman would peek through the opening and look for each one's parents, releasing them only if their Mom or Dad was standing nearby, waiting in the parking lot. If the parent was not there, the child was immediately returned to a room with a babysitter, and a

tardy slip was filled out to charge the parents account extra money for extra time. The door remained open for less than one minute. Robert needed to be on time.

Robert's phone rang as he walked briskly to his car. Seeing Eve's name on the caller ID, he felt annoyed with the interference to his urgent task and the requirement that demanded his immediate attention.

"Gram called me at work," she complained, without a greeting.

"How is she?" Robert inquired.

"I'm not sure. She was upset about something. She asked for a sandwich."

"A sandwich?" Robert repeated, not understanding.

"A turkey sandwich on rye," Eve poorly explained. "I told her that I was at work. Besides, I don't have turkey and rye."

"Why did she want that?"

"Am I a mind reader?" Eve retorted.

Robert made no reply, unhappy with the turn in the conversation. "*Why does she keep bothering me with this stuff?*" he asked himself.

"Can you get one for her?" he asked. "Maybe she is getting better and has a craving," he suggested.

"Well I don't know, but you're not listening to me," Eve scolded.

"I told you that she is upset about something."

"What do you mean?" he inquired.

"Gram was yelling at me. She seemed very agitated. She said that I don't care anything about her..." Eve paused, trying to recall Gram's words. She had been so surprised and shaken by the tone and expression that she had not previously known from Robert's grandmother, that she scarcely heard, or remembered the specific words said. Her mental awareness had been smothered by the dominating emotions of the moment.

"Really? She said that? Why would she say that?"

Eve found some clarity in her thoughts. "I think she said that no one cares about her." She paused.

Robert was taken aback by the report.

"I got to go. The supervisor is watching me," Eve complained.

The phone went dead.

Later that afternoon, when Eve finally came home from work two hours late, Robert attempted to learn more about his grandmother's call.

"Listen, I am exhausted. I had a terrible day at work. I don't know what her problem is, but Gram should not be calling me at work," Eve declared.

Not wanting to suffer a verbal beating, and sensing that one was coming, Robert made no quick reply, but watched Eve for signs of her anger subsiding.

She noticed his glare. "What do you want me to do?" she demanded.

"I don't know. Maybe we should go check on her?"

It was just after the dinner hour when Robert and Eve arrived at the nursing home. Stephen had been happy to get a sitter. He intended to keep her busy.

Eve held the turkey sandwich, tightly wrapped in plastic.

Gram was lying in her bed on her back, with her arms and hands straight along her sides. The sheet and blanket was neatly wrapped around her and pulled up to her chin. It looked as though the bed had just been made. Gram appeared to be in a deep sleep, breathing freely. Her color looked good. She did not move, not even to twitch her eye, when her visitors arrived. Robert noticed a clear glass of water, full to the top, sitting on her nightstand. The lights had been dimmed, and the window blinds were closed.

"Is she OK?" he asked Eve.

For what seemed like an hour, he watched as Eve studied her new patient. The pace of time had slowed suddenly, even stalled.

An aide was bustling about in a room adjacent. "I'm going to ask," Eve finally answered.

She left the room and Robert stood motionless looking at the unresponsive person before him. He wondered about the glass of water, thinking it odd that it remained there unused.

"She was given Roxicodone," Eve said upon returning, with some displeasure.

"What's that?" Robert asked.

"It's morphine," Eve said slowly, matter-of-factly. She turned and walked quickly toward the door.

"Where are you going now?" Robert demanded.

"To see the doctor," came her reply.

Once Gram became a resident at the nursing home, she was no longer allowed to see her doctor of many years, or the doctors who had treated her recently at the hospital. Dr. Johnston was a local boy who was heralded in the community circles of gossip as having made it big - he became a physician. But unable to maintain a healthy local practice, he had succumbed professionally to servicing several nursing homes in

the area. Still, Eve knew him from his better days at the hospital, when he actually had a reason to come there.

Eve approached Dr. Johnston quickly as he darted across the hallway. She greeted him pleasantly, and bypassed small talk to urgently inquire about the powerful drug that had been administered to Gram. Eve was determined to find out why Gram was being put into a deep sleep, even a semi-conscious state.

"She has a living will," the doctor answered in a monotone. "She is not to be treated for a terminal illness."

"What is her illness?" Eve asked quickly, hoping to catch him off guard.

"She has C.H.F. (congestive heart failure)," he answered, with his defenses rising.

"Esther was in the hospital just about two weeks ago."

"I know that," he interrupted.

"I talked to her cardiologist, Dr Kennedy, in the hospital," Eve explained sincerely, thinking that there must be a mistake taking place.

"Dr. Kennedy said that there is nothing wrong with her heart."

The dingy doctor lowered his clipboard and looked directly into Eve's eyes. She could see an expression of guilt on his face, but mostly his eyes were dull and lifeless.

"She wants to die," he said in his defense. "I had to have a terminal illness. I had to put something down on the paper. It is C.H.F.," his volume was rising.

"But she is just discouraged. I need to talk to her. Wake her up and she will tell you that she wants to live," Eve was trying to reason with the grim reaper.

His face was expression-less. His eyes narrowed. "I can't do that."

"There is nothing wrong with her," Eve protested. Her thoughts were racing, searching for a way to convince the doctor to change his mind. "If a twenty-year-old is badly hurt in an accident, and gets discouraged, and asks to die, will you kill him, or will you offer him counseling?" she challenged.

"This is different. She is 90 years old." The doctor was showing signs of impatience with the request.

"Then order a B.N.P. test," Eve challenged again. B-type Natriuretic Peptide is a simple lab test that would prove, or disprove the claim of congestive heart failure. It was commonly used at the hospital.

"No!" Johnston said firmly, and louder. "There will be no test!" His eyes darkened and suddenly turned red as some blood vessels

popped in them. He quickly moved away and sprinted down the hallway.

Upon hearing the account of her conversation with the nursing home doctor, Robert dropped his head and sighed. He looked again at the still glass of water. "Can she drink it?" he asked.

"No. She is medicated too heavily," Eve explained.

"Then why is it here?" Robert pried.

There was no answer.

"What next? Will the morphine kill her?" he asked.

"No, the drug won't kill her, but if they keep her this way, she will die without hydration," Eve offered an explanation that surprised even herself.

"Why?" he asked.

Again there was no answer.

He dropped his head again.

Like one on death row, the person condemned and about to die had requested her last meal, food of her choice. Her request, however, had been misunderstood, and unheeded. In a moment of final

desperation, Gram had reached out for help; to perhaps the only person she could trust to help her.

As Eve walked away from Gram's room she noticed a trash can and tossed the sandwich inside.

. His mind was reeling, but the facts that he understood were becoming even clearer. The treatment was intended to kill his grandmother.

It was a sleepless night for Love who determined to visit the nursing home in the morning and stop the treatment that would bring death. It seemed that the darkness persisted that long night. It was pressing upon his soul. He wondered if Gram would survive these seemingly endless hours. "*Dehydration is painful,*" he thought. "*I wonder if she feels a torment in her soul?*"

"She may be medicated physically, but what is happening in her mind? How can they even know if this is a painless death? This is euthanasia. How can they just kill a healthy person?" The questions came like ghosts screaming in agony.

He recounted the doctor's words: "I had to put something down on the paper."

"He admitted that it is a fraud," Robert told himself. "There is nothing wrong with her heart. She only suffered from lacking nutrition and dehydration in the group home."

Morning finally appeared, but a feeling of doom persisted.

There was no sunshine that day, only a dim light. The sky was gray and a mist of rain blew in the wind.

If a middle-aged woman could be a marine drill sergeant, it would be this woman, the nursing home administrator. She was hard, cold, uncaring and tough - tough as nails. She was of average height with broad shoulders and a medium to large build. Her hair was gray, shaved on the sides and trimmed around her ears. Her attire was neat, but generally unappealing. She wore a skirt low below her knees and thick heeled shoes. Her steps were quick. Her words were abrupt. She offered Love no seat, or other accommodation or gesture of hospitality. He stood there alone, in front of her desk.

"I know about Esther. We are keeping her comfortable," she insisted.

"But there's nothing wrong with her," Love protested.

"Not according to our doctor," she snapped back.

"You are killing her!" Love challenged.

"Watch yourself there!" she shot back. "She has a living will. We are following her wishes."

"Really?" Love suspected that she was bluffing.

Obviously annoyed, but responding as if the entire scene had been rehearsed, the stout woman reached down to her desk and picked up a paper. She handed it to Robert.

"But this doesn't prove anything," he protested.

"It's her living will," she sneered. "She signed it in front of her attorney, her daughter, and witnesses. This is her wish to die."

"No, no!" Love objected. "Take her off the morphine. Wake her up. I will prove to you that there is nothing wrong with her and that she wants to live."

"Then she would suffer," the administrator replied arrogantly.

Robert knew that he was losing the debate. The event of his grandmother's demise had been well planned. He wondered what this woman charged for her services. She had been well paid, no doubt. His sense of morals wrenched at his gut. He wondered how this was legal.

He started to spin around on his feet but stopped suddenly, and turned back to the procurer of death. "I'm going to report you," he threatened. "I'm going to call the Department of Health," he blurted, wondering if he had chosen the best authority to undermine hers.

He didn't have to wait long for a response. She was not riled, and seemed even more resolved.

"I'm sorry for your loss," she grinned slightly. "You're not seeing it clearly now. Go home and relax. Everything we do here is documented and we obey the letter of the law." Suddenly she smiled with evil delight, knowing that she had beaten him down.

That afternoon Love called a lawyer and left a message. Eventually a woman, who sounded very unsure of herself, much like a youngster, returned his call to ask a few questions that would determine if he had a case. She was a paralegal. She said she would take his concern under advisement but doubted that her firm would want to get involved.

Robert called a number for elderly abuse with the Department Of Aging. His complaint was summarized. His grandmother was under the care of a licensed physician who was following her living will. She was in a licensed nursing home where she was well cared for. She was 90 years old. Her death was to be expected. Her illness was terminal.

It was a lie, a vicious lie! She had no illness. The only thing unhealthy in regard to Gram was her checkbook balance. Love pondered his family history and the legacy that was being created. Once again the

family skeletons were rattling, even anxious to welcome some new bones of contention.

It was the second day after Gram was medicated with morphine and Robert and Eve returned to the nursing home feeling empty and sad. They had no plan, no strategy, and little hope. Robert wondered if they would even be allowed inside. Perhaps they could be with his grandmother during her last hours. Perhaps something would change. Perhaps they could save her.

But it was too late. Gram's bed was empty. It was too late for good-byes. The time to explore the mysteries of her past had expired. Granny's existence would now be documented simply by the date of her death. Her descendants could begin to forget. They could close the final chapter that told the story of her life. It was finished.

Eve wondered about Granny's arrangements and asked where she had been taken. She was gone - to the crematorium.

"There would be no viewing," Robert realized. "And there can be no investigation or autopsy. They have destroyed the evidence."

(Author's Note: Visit our web site addendum for insight into the legality of assisted suicide and how it applies to euthanasia. I have included information gleaned from medical journals published on the internet documenting the use of morphine to produce terminal dehydration. For more on this topic go to:

www.UpdykeBooks.com/addendum

6. Enlightenment

Need Hope? 1.877.800.PRAY (7729)

24-Hour Prayer Hotline

His love for life was lost. His love for others was smothered and consumed by his self-loathing and despair. Love seldom had positive thoughts now. His determinations and plans for achievement and success had slowly died as the last embers of a fire that became dimmer as its fuel was consumed and the black carbon that remained was no good, surrounded by smoke as evidence of the coming end. Where was there light or warmth for him? The thoughts that dominated were the haunting memories of the losses of recent years. Things weren't getting better. Love could see no opportunity for goodness.

He came to this stark realization one morning while searching for proof of the purchase of his car and the warranty that he had been pressed to pay extra for. He had opened a folder full of old photos, favorites of the years past, hastily collected during packing and shoved

into a box to be too quickly forgotten. Happy, smiling faces looked back at him. Eve had been a beautiful bride. Stephen was always smiling as a baby. There was a posed photo with Granny. Everyone appeared to be much thinner, younger, even happy. Was that a sparkle in the eye? Smiles were broad and intense. It all confronted Love to an awareness of his present loss, the happiness, even the expectation for life to bring shared experiences that would be cherished and remembered. He recalled them, once designated as "memory days," and documented with these photos. Where had the good times gone?

Robert sat on the attic floor, not concerned about the dust and animal droppings evident there. He paused and pondered about his life. *"I need a new determination for life,"* he told himself. *"I don't know how many days I have left, but I have to find a reason to make them count again. How do I get out of this place of doom?"* he wondered. *"How can I start living again?"*

Love looked at the photos once more, specific memories causing a slight grin to appear on his face, dimly lit by a beam of light that found a clear spot on the darkened window that was covered with cobwebs in the distance, centered in the triangular shape of the gable end of the old house. Then sadness came like a flood, quickly extinguishing the new spark for life ignited by love known in his past, once expressed freely

and received with joy. "*How did I get here?*" he remorse. "*How much have I hurt Eve and Stephen?*" he pronounced condemnation on himself.

The sound of a delivery truck outside jarred him back to his dismal reality. Robert dropped the photos into the cardboard box, and reached for the lid. He was emotionally and mentally agitated. His hands shook slightly as he tried to keep the top of the box level, not wanting to soil the proof of better times by spilling the thick dust of years since, a residue that had accumulated on the top of the box. They were memories of good times, stored away, then covered with the dirt of the present. They needed to be kept separate.

The sweet memories brought little comfort, but stirred a greater remorse. They served as a summons to a judgement, not of what he had accomplished in life, but to a conviction of his pressing failure and loss. Love heard a proclamation of death, much like a murderer standing before his judge for the sentencing of his crime. The courtroom of his life had convicted him. The smiles of the past had been the jury that delivered the verdict.

"What value does my life have," he wondered to himself. "We are all irrelevant. All we do is consume."

([condemned](#): John 3:18, Psa 31:10, Psa 32:4-7. [Encourage](#) a friend.)

He felt the pain of knowing the system that had killed his grandmother, a vivacious elderly woman, because she had become a liability, costing too much to keep. She had no value. *“Is this now the American way?”* he wondered remorsefully. *“Is this what a nursing home does when its resident runs out of money?”*

“Maybe there are just too many of us,” he considered. *“She was unproductive. Human life seems to have no value,”* he attempted to justify her being terminated by dehydration and sent to the fire that quickly consumed her body.

Love was not stunned at the thoughts, the condemnation on humanity, and on himself, as in his present state he felt little value in his own life.

But were these his thoughts, or ones that came to him, from a source of evil beyond the confines of his being? Was there hope for him? Love acknowledged to himself his need for help, and secretly wondered where and how he would find it. He even wondered if he would survive this despair.

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24-Hour Prayer Hotline

It was another gray Wednesday. Eve had left for work in the darkness before the morning light, stirring him awake with the extra noise she made and the lights she turned on. No doubt it was her intent to wake him, but Robert refused to rise and remained prostrate, keeping his eyes closed, even when he sensed that she was looking at him. His alarm would sound an hour later and Stephen would wake then also, immediately demanding his breakfast as he began tossing toys around the house. Robert would push himself to rise, and push even harder for the mental and physical energy to get through his morning's Mr. Mom routine. His eyes were dim. His hair was shuffled; his clothes were dirty. Robert felt that dull pain in his chest and a more distinct pain in his joints as he slowly moved about, within the walls that confined him to the prison of his despair. Was it his heart that hurt? The night before, after falling asleep in front of the TV, the chest pain was more intense as he forced himself up the stairway to his bedroom. As he dropped to the flattened pillow, he wondered if he would wake to see another day, and almost didn't care if he did not, dreading the drudgery of it, all repeating again like a joke that isn't funny.

After dropping his son off at daycare he would quickly shave, shower, and dress for work putting on the false air of professionalism required to discuss another's real estate needs. Today he had no appointments but was scheduled for floor time between noon and two, long enough for the office regulars who had seniority to have their social time around a lunch table, unpressed by time. He would have to race back to catch the momentary opening of the door for Stephen's dismissal.

As he approached the intersection of Wyoming Avenue and Academy Street, he felt the lure of the breakfast foods at the State Room, which was straight ahead. To go to the office required a right turn. Why he was headed there, in his dismal reality, he didn't know. He went straight through the intersection, for some relief from the demands of the day. Eve was unaware of his visits to the local diner, and going there felt a little bit like an escape. It was a hiding place of sorts. Secrets were becoming more important to Robert these days.

John Wright sat in his usual spot holding a cup of coffee high to feel its steam on his face. His glasses were fogged.

"Robert, is that you?" he inquired. "What a pleasant surprise."

"Hi John," he answered without enthusiasm. "Guess I'm craving some more of the grease this place serves disguised as food."

John chuckled.

"I do have to admit," Love continued. "The home fries here are the best."

"Well order up!" John suggested. "Just coffee for me today. I have to watch the waist," he paused. "Well actually," he began to confess, "I have a physical for my life insurance policy. I can't flunk it. So, I have to get my pressure down, and get off my cholesterol medication."

Robert grimaced at the thought. "Is that even possible?" he mostly asked himself.

"Got to do it," Wright confirmed. "But say, how are you doing?"

The sudden question caught Robert off guard. He spoke from his emotions, not taking the time to reason for a response that would have been more discrete.

"The dredges of life has got me today." He paused. "I've been thinking about my grandmother, and her death is disturbing."

"I'm sorry Robert," John quickly offered the appropriate expression of condolence.

"No, no, it wasn't recently," Robert countered, wanting to avoid the intimacy of personal loss. He paused and the silence between the two seemed to go on for minutes, although it was only seconds that lapsed.

"Things aren't going as I planned," Love offered. "Or as I had hoped," he concluded.

John finally lowered his cup of brew and leaned back in his seat. Robert could tell when his friend was reaching deeper within, and focused for the revelation he expected that would require his full consideration.

"We think we know and understand all things," John offered cautiously. "We think we are in control of our lives, and that we live in the cause and effect of our own decisions and actions. We intend to tolerate the consequences we bring upon ourselves."

"Isn't that the way it is?" Wright asked. He was looking down and paused. "But what if..." and his intensifying glance caught Robert's eye.

"Wisdom is beginning to ask why, and what if..." There was another pause, and Robert began to process the enormity of this revelation. His mind had been full of difficult questions lately, even that morning.

"What if there is a force stronger than yourself, that you have submitted to and that now holds you as hostage?"

"Robert, there is that ransom upon your life," he said. "Do you remember how I explained it to you the last time we met?"

"Yes," Love answered with hesitation. "You said that God sent his own Son into the world to pay the penalty, the ransom, as you call it."

John smiled broadly. "Yes, that's it. He paid the penalty for your sin, the sin of this world that is holding you in a place of despair. He conquered sin and death for us."

Love reeled at the proclamation of life over death. He had felt and knew the grasp of death and dying. His life had been a series of efforts that lacked value.

Robert thought Wright had finished his discourse and felt a bit breached. Something was rising up from deep within. Before he could express the feeling, Wright continued.

"I heard this song yesterday on the radio," the change in tone surprised Love. "It caught my attention, so I went on line, and found the words of the song. The artist is Laura Story." He reached into his shirt pocket and then across the table. He was holding a folded white paper. Robert accepted the gesture. He unfolded the paper with curiosity rising.

Scrawled upon it were these words:

"We pray for blessings, we pray for peace...

We pray for healing, for prosperity...

We pray for Your mighty hand to ease our suffering...

"We cry in anger when we cannot feel You near,

We doubt your goodness, we doubt Your love...

And all the while, You hear each desperate plea,

And long that we'd have faith to believe.

"When friends betray us,

When darkness seems to win,

We know that pain reminds this heart,

This is not our home...

"Cause what if Your blessings come through rain drops,

What if Your healing comes through tears,

What if a thousand sleepless nights are what it takes to know

You're near,

"What if my greatest disappointments or the aching of this life,

Is the revealing of a greater thirst this world can't satisfy,

What if trials of this life,

The rain, the storms, the hardest nights,

Are your mercies in disguise."

(Partial lyrics from "Blessings" by Laura Story, published April, 2011 by Columbia/Ino)

On the bottom on the paper were written the words, "kLove - 107.1 FM"

Robert stared at the white paper as he considered the words written there.

Wright had finished talking, and a great silence settled upon him. Before Robert could decipher a response, John stood to his feet and picked up his friend's diner tab. He reached toward Robert and patted his shoulder as if he intended an embrace. "I love you, brother."

The words stunned Love. Before he felt that he had control of his racing thoughts and wild emotions, Wright turned and walked away. Robert was not sure that he noticed what happened next, but vaguely remembered seeing John walk toward the door.

Sounds and faces blurred as Robert quickly tossed three dollars on the table and gathered his wits to leave also. Outside the wind blew a cold rain against his face and he lost his grip on the storm door. It banged loudly against the rod iron railing that was covered in black peeling paint with rust dominating the twisted surface.

He ran to his car, started the engine, and reached into his pants pocket for the paper. It was still there, and he unfolded it again. The words written there began to speak to his heart.

Robert reached to his audio controls, pressed a couple buttons to find the FM frequency, and turned the knob, seeking 107 on the digital display. It was at the other end of the radio's range, but he persisted in twisting the tuner knob. It was faint, but a contemporary song was playing. He thought he heard the words, "I'm worn." He reached for the volume and leaned in to hear better.

The melody carried the message that crashed within his brain.

"I'm tired, I'm worn - My heart is heavy,

From the work it takes - To keep on breathing,

I've made mistakes - I've let my hope fail,

My soul feels crushed - By the weight of this world...

"Let me see redemption win,
Let me know the struggle ends,
That You can mend a heart that's frail and torn,
I wanna know a song can rise,
From the ashes of a broken life,
And all that's dead inside can be reborn...

"I know I need - To lift my eyes up,
But I'm too weak - Life just won't let up,
And I know that You can give me rest,
So I cry out with all that I have left,
My prayers are wearing thin,
I'm worn - Even before the day begins.
I'm worn - I've lost my will to fight...

(Partial lyrics from "Worn" by Mike Donehey, Jeff Owen and
Jason Ingram, Tenth Avenue North, "The Struggle" album published by
Reunion Records, 2012)

Robert felt tears coming to his eyes. They blurred and burned at the edges. He had been exposed, even to the depths, revealing his deepest secret, his longing for death. He felt a trembling inside as he reached for the transmission shifter. He pressed against this overwhelming emotion to pause for clarity. He looked in the side mirror and waited for an oncoming car. It splashed dirty water against the passenger window, and the crashing noise caused him to jump in his seat.

There was a small town park up ahead, and Robert pulled off the street as his tears began to flow. He pulled into a small parking lot. There were no other cars there during this mid-morning. But the rain had stopped, so Robert opened his car door seeking an open space to vent the exploding feelings that were heavy upon him and seemed to be smothering him in the small, confining space of his car.

Unaware of where he was going, he stumbled on a fallen limb, and brushed against the Laurel as he rushed into the woods, seeking solace and privacy. The tears were increasing and despite his attempt for control, he felt unable to stop them.

He sat on a bank overlooking a stream. The sound of the babbling brook was as a soothing suave to the aching pain he felt within.

He lowered his head, closed his eyes, and reached for wisdom beyond his being.

Robert prayed, "Oh God, I really am worn. I am broken and dead. Can you help me, Lord?" He paused and wiped at his eyes one at a time with his wrists. "I must be held captive, and I have served my own lust and desire," Robert admitted in prayer to his Creator. "Forgive me. I accept your ransom. Take my life, and make it new. I want to live for you and not for myself any longer."

([repented](#): Pro 28:13, Psa 32:3-5, 1Jo 1:5-10. [Encourage](#) a friend.)

He paused with his head still bowed and eyes closed. Suffocation was leaving, and free breathing returned. He felt the burden being lifted and his pulse quickened as his heart responded to the new freedom it suddenly encountered. He sighed. The heaviness of heart and soul was finally gone. Happy thoughts filled his mind. He remembered and clearly saw the smiles from the photos, Eve and Stephen welcoming his return. A sense of energy, even exuberance came upon him. In his mind he saw a prison door opening. "*Am I free?*" he wondered to himself. Then audibly he said, "Thank you, Lord."

He lifted his head, his countenance changed. Looking upward he saw a crack forming in the dense clouds that covered the sun. A beam of

light emerged and reached downward. At first it seemed to travel slowly, suspended in time and space. Then it broke upon his face with intense light and gentle warmth. Everything around him dimmed and faded. The contrast was astounding.

It completed and filled him. A transformation occurred in Robert Love, the flesh man, as his spirit was filled with the healing and true love of the Savior.

The Son touched him. Like an electric shock, his body surged with energy, and a new life came. Love was reborn.

([ignited](#): 2Co 5:17-18, Joh 3:3, 1 Pe 1:3, 23-25. [Encourage](#) a friend.)

“Thank you, Jesus.”

([transformed](#): Joh 3:5-6, Rom 12:2, 2Co 4:16-18. [Encourage](#) a friend.)

7. The Crash

The spirit of man is his powerhouse, fueling him to do much or little, depending on the amount of energy he has. For most, discouragement prevails. The scars of hurtful experiences are like breaks in the boiler, dispensing desire, to be lost in the atmosphere of regret. Complacency replaces passion. The wanting of leisure smothers drive. But when God comes into a person's life and physical existence, that person's spirit is revived. Like gasoline thrown on a fire, the person regenerated by the Creator experiences an explosion of almost incomprehensible spiritual energy. It is true love, hope, joy, and new purpose. Life changes. A profoundly strange source and power for life is discovered and possessed by a mere mortal. It is incarnation and immortality. Jesus made the way. He is the Life!

Robert sat still, receiving all there was to receive, as the transformation continued. He thought about his grandmother. "Forgive

them," he prayed, and hearing the words he surprised himself, as he became more consciously aware of his physical being. "Lord, give Granny a hug from me now."

Resolution. Rest.

Robert opened his eyes widely. Looking around he sensed and saw life budding and blooming everywhere. It was in stark contrast to what he had known only a few minutes ago. God's creation was beautiful before him.

"*I've got to get going,*" he suddenly realized the present time and the hours that had lapsed nearly unnoticed. Robert nearly sprinted back to his car. His spine was straight, shoulders were back, and he held his head high. It felt natural, even relaxing. "Wow," he declared to himself. "*This is different.*"

Even the car which he had stressed about and despised, now seemed better, newer. The sun shone brightly on his windshield, magnified by the water that sprayed there from the hood of the car. Light danced on the slanted glass. Was his Chevy faster now? He reached for the wipers, and suddenly his phone rang. He glanced toward the seat where it resided next to him, and then he heard a horn, a loud demanding blast. Quickly returning his attention to the road he saw bright lights before him and stomped on the brake pedal instinctively.

The phone shot into the air, tumbling toward the floor, and wanting to share the good news of his joyful experience, Robert quickly glanced that way hoping to catch it mid-air.

There was a loud screeching noise, a flash of light and intense heat. Then blackness. Love had lost consciousness.

Robert had been crushed in the wreckage like a candy wrapper in a fist. He had enjoyed, but only for a few fleeting moments, his new life.

Would this be his end?

8. Awakened

And His New Life Begins

Robert would later learn from a police report that he had collided head-on with a Ford F250, a large diesel powered pick-up driven by a local painting contractor. That driver had spent most of the previous night in a local bar, whining as he attempted to drown away the pain of his disheveled life. His girlfriend had left him after he was fired in the middle of a big job. Money was what they needed, and had hoped for. They would use his earnings to pay some of the creditors who were pressing in. But this painter, a notorious philanderer and boozier, had picked up a female college freshman at the Outpost on a Friday night, the week before, and had not shuffled back into his front door until Sunday afternoon. His partner went almost crazy in her fury. She had spent the weekend rocking and patting the back of a cranky 11-month-old boy. He was also named Tony, after his undeserving father, who was better known around town as “Tilt.” Young Tony had cried continuously for

several days. His mother had no money, not even enough to purchase temporary relief at the local pharmacy.

Tilt was lit when he unknowingly drifted across the centerline and struck Robert's Cavalier, a compact car. The blood alcohol test revealed a level of 4.4 on the intoxicated driver. He was unable to open the driver's door, but pushed open the passenger side door and fell out in a stupor. The drop of about 30 inches caused a minor abrasion on his forehead, but otherwise he had no injuries. He had recovered to an awareness of his present dilemma, and ran into the woods in an attempt of fleeing the authorities. He was picked up at the nearest bar.

Rescuers worked for 50 minutes using the Jaws of Life to free Robert from the crumbled wreckage that imprisoned him. He was nearly unrecognizable as blood streamed down his face, and nearly covered his head that drooped forward.

As the sound of sirens echoed against the nearby townhouses, a crowd began to form on the street corner. Most were busybodies, hoping for some juicy gossip to share with their friends and co-workers. A police van came screeching to a halt and an uniformed man jumped out of the rear of the vehicle with a barricade. "Back, you must get back," he cautioned. "Come on, let's give them room to do their work."

A young man with a camera draped around his neck, and a press badge dangling from a cord, stood a little closer to the wreckage. The startled look on his face told of the seriousness of the accident. He had seen many others, and had been close to victims as they quietly died, many times before. This reporter was expecting the rescuers to pause at any time, to bring out the white sheet, and to cover the victim, blocking the view of him. He glanced down the street, expecting to see the coroner's vehicle approaching.

Instead, the rescuers worked diligently and efficiently, like a well-oiled machine. Although used in the field rarely, this procedure had been rehearsed many times, and they softly shouted commands to each other. A medic held Robert's hand. It too was bloodied. The photographer overheard him warn, "His pulse is getting weaker. You have to hurry. I think we're losing him."

The portable machines groaned and clattered. There was smoke and dust in the air. Three firemen rushed forward and together they lifted the roof off the wreckage. Another used hydraulic pressure to push the dash away from the floor.

Time was running out. Robert was facing death as his blood continued to drain from his body, gushing from deep laceration in his

legs, which were nearly severed on impact. Everyone was expecting the worse.

Perhaps it was in the supernatural or spiritual realm, that which cannot be seen, that a life-saving measure was administered to Robert's body, even as his organs began to shut down. His time had not yet come.

His broken and blood soaked body was slowly lifted, then suddenly held in place. Another rescuer was summoned. It was the young man who had been monitoring Robert's vital signs. He quickly ran forward. As the news photographer watched in horror, the man ducked inside the wreckage to reach for a foot, twisted and still caught there. It seemed like minutes passed as time suddenly paused. Those who lifted the victim and now held him mid- air without support from a grounded object groaned and urgently shouted additional instructions. Finally, Robert was freed from the vehicle of doom. He was quickly placed on a gurney and rolled toward the ambulance.

The reporter jumped back as the victim was whisked by. Robert's arm protruded outward and almost brushed against him. Blood dripped from his fingers. The ambulance's engine was already running and the lights were flashing. The bright strobes reflected back with colors of red and blue. There was a slight delay, and then the ambulance lurched forward with its sirens blaring. Fire police had placed barricades

on the edge of the roadway and continued to scold the onlookers. A policeman was unrolling a yellow tape that bore the words, “Police Line – Do Not Enter.”

As the reporter walked away he encountered a TV cameraman rushing forward with the anchor from the noon news program. They recognized each other. “How bad?” she asked her news colleague. “By the time he arrives at the hospital,” he answered, “it will be a fatality. D.O.A.”

The attractive, young woman appeared in stark contrast to the accident scene she approached. She looked that way, then back, and quickly fielded another question toward the retreating photographer. “Only one?” But he quickened his step and made no response. Members of the competing media were cordially friendly, but confidentially tried to protect their turf. The newspaper photos and article would not be presented to the public until the morning of the next day. Newspaper reporters were at a distinct disadvantage, and continually lost readers, as the public got their appetites for real-life violence fed by the electronic broadcast of the news.

Robert coded in the ambulance, but the medics were able to force his heart’s beatings to restart. He was rushed into surgery for multiple fractures, including a broken back. He also suffered from

internal injuries, which included a ruptured spleen, and there was the need for hundreds of sutures to reattach his scalp and ear. They were nearly severed by the pressing of the broken windshield, which although shattered, a portion of it remained intact held together by the plastic film that was layered between the pieces of thin glass.

Eight flights of stairs above the Intensive Care Unit, Eve was busy administering chemotherapy to a patient on her floor. Stephen was in daycare and Robert was supposed to pick him up within three hours.

At first, Eve paid no attention to the ring that summoned the unit secretary to the phone, but saw panic come upon her face and was surprised when the phone receiver slipped from her hand. Another nurse standing nearby quickly intervened, to question the secretary. “Kim, what is it? What’s wrong,” she demanded. Kim regained her composure and tried to respond. She was feeling a surge of emotion after realizing the impact of the bad news she had just been told. Tears came to her eyes. Her face twitched and her hand trembled as she picked up the phone once again. “It’s for Eve.” It was a short statement that seemed to cause the lights to fade, although in reality, only the perception of her surroundings was changing as panic set in. “Her husband was in an accident.”

Eve had overheard the confession. Her jaw dropped, but words evaded her. Another nurse quickly rushed to her side. “OK, Hun, take it easy. We will help you through this. Come over here,” she gestured to a nearby chair. “Let’s find out what happened.”

Eve looked toward the large circular clock that was boldly positioned on the wall above the nurses’ desk. The second hand paused, then in slow motion, it sought the next digit marking the clock’s frowning face. Again, it paused. The clock was consuming her mind as her thoughts spun out of control and the emotions of fear began to overwhelm her. The clock provided some momentary stability as she sought for a secure place to seek for the strength she needed to respond.

Finally, she spoke, softly with her words drawn as she gazed into space somewhere down the hall. It was confining upon her consciousness as it narrowed and darkened to a place that was indistinguishable and dark.

"Is he dead?"

As Eve approached the ICU she was quickly stopped. Robert was still in surgery. She was escorted to an adjoining hallway cluttered with machines on wheels. It all looked very threatening. She retreated to the nearest door and ahead she saw the symbol for the women’s restroom. She darted inside and quickly entered a stall, her vision

blurred by the tears that were now dropping to the floor, forming spots on the streaks left there by a dirty mop. She sat on the toilet lid and began to cry quietly, then overwhelmed with fear, she began to tremble and weep uncontrollably.

As soon as her head nurse returned to the floor from a meeting and heard about the call that sent Eve running to the ICU, she spun on her heels and started toward the elevator. She pressed the button for the main floor and waited impatiently as she tapped her fingers against the tiled wall. “Come on, come on,” she urged. She heard two tones and the light above the door lit.

Exiting the elevator, Karen ran past the sign and arrow indicating the way to the ICU. She flung its doors wide open, rushing in, with no regard for those standing nearby. “Where is Eve?” she demanded. The girl at the desk immediately became annoyed at the intrusion. “Can’t you hear me?” Karen nearly shouted. “Where is Eve?”

The receptionist, sensing a personal challenge, refused to lift her head to acknowledge the demand.

“Come on, come on, I don’t want to get into it with you!” Karen became even more agitated and slapped the palm of her hand down on the top of the counter.

The ICU secretary threw her pen at the desk back and rudely replied, “Who in the heck is Eve anyway?”

The nearby door had opened and a nurse entered in time to observe the confrontation that was quickly escalating at the desk. Karen noticed and redirected toward her. “Did you see Eve Love come through here?” She paused. “She is a nurse on Four East. Her husband was just brought in.”

A look of shock, then recognition came over the ICU nurse’s face. She stepped back and opened the door to the room from which she had just exited. She held it open but spoke no words. She simply motioned by jerking her head in that direction.

Karen darted through and saw only empty chairs where crumpled magazines littered the seats. She continued to the only visible exit and pushed hard on the doors. It was then that she heard the sound of a person crying. They were deep, dredging sobs.

Karen found Eve in the place where she had sought solace, but it now confined and held her in a prison of dread and doom. She pulled Eve to herself in a commanding embrace.

When the curtain was finally pulled back and Eve stepped forward holding Karen's hand, their worse fears were confirmed. The body that lay in a narrow bed before them was barely recognizable. Machines surrounded it. There were tubes, small and large, running everywhere. They observed the motion of a breathing machine and saw the flexible pipe that led to the trachea. It was only a moment later that a person in a surgical mask instructed them both to leave. Eve had not even been able to make a greeting or a farewell to her husband. She felt no comfort. In this place, there was the feeling of death. It was suffocating.

It was several days later that Robert was placed in isolation, still within the confines of the ICU. It was then that a doctor reluctantly shared his clipboard with Eve. He was a surgeon that she knew well and worked with almost daily. They feared that an infection was present. The reason for Robert's lingering unconsciousness was not completely understood, so he was heavily medicated to promote healing.

It was almost a week later that a Transesophageal Echocardiogram (TEE) confirmed what Eve feared. There was vegetation in his heart, confirming evidence of an infection that had gotten into his blood stream and then spread throughout his injured and broken body. The words of diagnosis would be written in his chart, Bacterial Endocarditis. Robert

became septic after the emergency room surgery. His heart was infected and could be damaged.

Another week ensued. Hope for Robert was waning, and the time allowed for treatment was coming to an end. The nearly three weeks since that fateful day, the day of the terrible crash, had been very difficult for Eve. She knew the medical profession well. She understood the reality of the restrictions in place by national health care. She had been instructed in continuing education classes that statistics, well documented from years of experience in the medical field, had proven that their policy changes were correct. A person should not be preserved in a vegetative state, and false hopes of recovery should not be propagated. Furthermore, there were the issues of quality of life. Why should a person be saved to live discontented and then become resentful because of their disabilities?

Her hand shook as she signed the consent form.

Robert had no living will or other legal documents to prevent it. Even if he had, the strong arm of the governing board could supercede his intent because of the extreme circumstances, by issuing an insightful interruption that would empower hospice to end his life by stopping the

treatment that was no longer producing results, and was no longer cost effective. He would be kept comfortable.

The signed document established a brief future for Robert. He would be a “no code,” with “comfort measures only.” Eve had spent less time in visitation, in her husband’s room, as she waited for the end to come. She watched silently as his medications and treatments were withdrawn.

Robert Love existed in a void of consciousness with brief visits back to a partial and surreal reality that was mostly unknown to him. He was not aware of an awakening, and had no awareness of his surroundings. It was simply a voice that he somewhat understood. As he tried to answer, the cloak of darkness would return. It's like the light came on and then just as quickly, it went off again. Then there was a complete void.

Those tending to his physical needs were unaware that Love was nearly escaping from his coma.

Now he was back and this time he not only understood their words, but also reasoned on them. He knew their meaning and pondered their purpose.

"Tomorrow we will start the morphine," a female was saying. Her tone was hard and cold. "Doctor Sudol will check him in the morning. If there is no improvement, he will give the orders."

"But he is alive. He may still wake up," another protested. She sounded younger and uncertain.

"It's the new regulation. National Care is changing everything. We cannot keep him this way. His time is up." Short, firm statements that lacked emotion or caring were intended to set in motion the process of death for this badly injured patient.

"Tomorrow we stop the fluids and start the drug. He will be comfortable... if he feels anything." The nurse with experience in hospice seemed as the grim reaper, hovering over the body, waiting to claim another soul from the realms of earth. It would be one less debt for the national health care program.

"No, this cannot be happening to me," he thought. He pressed against the suffocating veil of blackness. He was trying to return. He wanted to live. He had the will to live!

Today was the day to increase the dosage of morphine. It would no longer just control the pain of a broken, but healing body, but would place Robert in a deeper sleep, a place of comfort beyond the demands of

his physical being, even beyond the evident pain of dehydration. It would be dehydration that would bring the death that the medical professionals now considered to be merciful.

But Robert once again became semi-conscious. He heard a shrill, loud sound resembling laughter. Then there was a retort, which was quick and sharp. The sound of a doctor and nurse teasing each other vibrated in his brain, like the covering of a snare drum. What he mostly sensed was the impact of a loud, disturbing, and awakening noise.

The conversation became more discernable. Without realizing that he had opened his eyes, he noticed the bright light coming from the hallway that poured into his room from an opened door. Next, he perceived the blurry, gray, unformed images that resembled human form.

His mind reeled and spun, like the tuner of an old radio that sought for a clear signal. This input needed amplification. He closed his eyes for rest and reflection. The awareness of his surroundings, a consciousness that he was unable to fully comprehend, was startling and caused him to feel fear. It was a strange thing to have thought and feeling again. His mind came alive as his nerve receptors once again sent in their reports. Sensory perception was beginning. Robert Love was coming back to the reality of his life, in the nick of time to avoid his death. Still, he had no awareness of who he was or where he was. He

had no understanding, only a flood of sensory information that he was not fully able to process in his drug induced state.

Footsteps echoed in the hallway and the volume of their sound increased as they approached Robert's room.

The nurse was wearing silicone gloves and carrying a syringe in the palm of her left hand. It contained morphine, a dosage which was increased tenfold from his previous dose, given for pain.

The young woman was approaching her twenty-sixth birthday, was single, and still hopeful for humanity and life. Someday, she hoped to have a family of her own.

She was the one who had protested the initiation of the process of terminal dehydration for this accident victim.

Now, her motions were mechanical. She had been forced to administer the morphine that promoted a peaceful death many times before. It was because of her moral objection, that the task was frequently imposed upon her. She had to be hardened to the realities of life and death, and needed to accept and become comfortable with her role in treating the patient in both processes.

She opened the outer package and held up the syringe to watch the fluid inside. She dispelled the air, even though placing some in the

“y” site of the IV tubing would not much matter during this particular procedure.

She mechanically inserted the syringe into the IV inlet and began to press on its plunger, as she apologetically looked to her patient, still feeling remorse, and a desire to bid him farewell.

He was gazing at her, and when their eyes met, a slight smile formed on his face.

“Oh my god!” she stammered and jumped in surprise. With that motion she stumbled backwards and released the syringe.

There it was, dangling in the air, still attached to the IV tubing. The plunger was waiting to be pressed, for the delivery of the powerful drug.

Robert watched unaware of his brush with death, delivered by his health care provider.

He was to become one for the record books, one who beat the odds, one who registered in the statistics represented by the numbers that are less than 10 percent. National Health Care did not believe in the miraculous. Such oddities simply remained unexplained, as an unusual event. Still, it was tremendously significant.

9. Adjustments -

Seeking to Survive, Against the Odds

During the next days, weeks, and months, Robert faced many challenges for recovery that would have potentially devastated someone else. His memory returned slowly, and one lonely afternoon he fully recalled his conversation with John Wright. His last distinct memory was getting in his car and turning the corner at State Street. He had a strong recollection of visiting the park, and of his repentant prayer. He again felt the strength of a new spirit within and asked Eve to bring him a Bible. He wished for a visit from his spiritual mentor, but Eve had not previously heard of him and did not know how to reach John Wright. Robert told her of their encounters and his new understanding as he observed her frown of disapproval. Whenever he attempted to tell her again, she quickly interrupted and changed the subject. Because it was so important to him, one day Robert pressed beyond her objections. He

took her to a place that was uncomfortable for them both. Eve paused and then suggested that Robert was confused and had not yet recovered fully from the trauma of his accident.

In the ensuing months, Robert entered a nursing home with a rehabilitation program. He struggled to learn to walk again.

His outlook remained positive, his spirit and determination were strong, and Robert pressed on, despite Eve's changing demeanor. It was hard for her. She was constantly shuffling Stephen between relatives who consented very reluctantly. Each time she called upon them, their excuses increased, and their objection was becoming more evident.

She had to continue to work as her job produced their only income. A part-time position was available at the nursery, the surviving part of Love's business, but it was too physically demanding for Robert. His position as a real estate salesperson was considered self-employment, so Robert was denied unemployment compensation. His counselor advised against a claim for disability until the full prognosis of his injuries and recovery were known and established by medical opinion that could not be easily discounted by those who sat on the review board.

Eventually, Robert returned home. He could transport Stephen to and from daycare, and watch over him while in the house. Doing so

relieved Eve of some stress. Robert spent a lot of time reading, and observed that Eve was becoming more critical of him. She said he wasn't doing enough for Stephen, who spent most of his time watching TV.

Days dragged slowly on and Eve's patience was wearing thin. She began to refuse to communicate with Robert and acted to intentionally avoid him when she was home.

A Home Health nurse visited on Thursday, and a van picked up Robert to transport him to therapy twice weekly. He was uncomfortable and unwilling to make the drive into the city.

Robert retreated to his own safe place, and when he was not indulging in a novel, he was reading his Bible. He tried many times to share his new insights with Eve, but she constantly refused and became embittered about the demanding situation of her life.

Robert had become the unbearable burden that kept her enslaved to his every need. After all, she was a nurse and expected to perform dutifully, despite the growing resentment she felt. No one understood her pain, not even her sister, her confidant, and closest friend. Those at work began to ask suggestive questions. "How much longer until he recovers?" and "How do you keep going?" She sought for the chance to leave their home during weekends, after Stephen went to bed. She would

meet with the girls from work and go out for a drink. Eve told herself that she deserved a break. Besides, it was innocent. At the club she heard laughter and when nearly intoxicated, she felt and considered her desire to again be attractive to a man who would truly appreciate her for her many charms, waning as they were. As she watched others dance and flirt she fantasized about the love life she lost but still desired.

Eve returned to their home late at night, hating to see the place again. She filled a large glass with wine and dropped into a recliner. Only the alcohol could numb her pain, until she zoned out. As she drifted off, she often dropped her glass to the floor. She would stir many hours later, during the twilight of another morning and quickly clean up the mess before Robert's alarm sounded.

Sometimes Robert slept in the lounge chair in the downstairs TV room. He would struggle in the middle of the night to conquer the stairs that led to the family room.

Tonight he stood in dismal disbelief at the sight of his wife, slumped in the chair, a wineglass hanging upside down from her hand. It dangled there precariously; the base of the glass had been caught by her knuckles, as it tilted and the stem fell downward, sliding between her fingers. There was a large red spot on the carpet below.

He felt a darkness of soul come upon him as he stood there leaning on his cane and swaying slightly from side to side. He stiffened to maintain his posture, wanting to avoid a stumble that would awaken her. He dreaded her fury.

Not wanting to be found out, he turned and dragged himself up a second flight of stairs, slowly, meticulously, careful not to make a loud noise. At times he held tightly to the banister with his left hand and reached behind his right leg with his right hand, to provide the lift needed for the next step. It was a physically demanding struggle, and despite his strong determination to conquer the feat, he felt a pressing weight on his back. Tears came to his eyes as he heard in his mind the persuasion that instructed him to endorse despair.

As he sat on the edge of his queen bed, he refused to look at the side once occupied by a companion and friend. He had long ago accepted this place of solitude. Often he was able to avoid the smothering feelings of loneliness, but tonight, in the early morning hours of a new day, he was unable to avoid their ravaging pain.

Robert knew and admitted to himself that he was losing Eve. He wondered, "*how much longer?*" He wiped another tear from his left eye and dropped to a pillow below. His body was jarred and a sharp pain darted up his spine. But he little cared. "*What next,*" he asked himself.

Then he uttered a brief prayer, feeling a desperate need for help. “Please God, help me. I am alive, but I can’t work.” Another despairing thought came in response. “*What good am I?*” he wondered. Quickly relenting of the self-pity that nearly consumed him, he continued with his prayer. “I’m sorry. I’m so sorry for it all. But Lord, what do you want me to do now? Why did you save me?”

He paused as the veil of exhaustion began to press upon him and slow his thoughts. “Please help Eve,” he prayed. “She really needs you now.”

And Robert closed his blood-shot eyes, drifting off to a disturbed and restless sleep once again.

The next afternoon, a letter arrived for Eve, addressed to her alone. It was from Engle Law. Suspecting the worse, Robert was overwhelmed with fear, and acted against his better judgement to open the envelope. He pulled out a simple invoice. In the item line he saw the words, “no fault divorce,” followed by a corresponding charge. \$2,500 dollars.

Robert looked at his Bible sitting on the table and began to feel resentment toward it. “*Where is John,*” he wondered. “*What would he tell me now?*”

Suddenly he had a challenging idea. “*Today,*” he told himself. “*I will search through old wireless bills for his number.*” He almost revived at the thought and reveled in the self-made suggestion of challenging his friend in an intellectual conversation once again.

When Eve returned home two hours after quitting time, she found Robert waiting for her. He handed her the envelope.

She saw the return address and quickly tossed it aside. “Yes, Robert. Yes! It’s true! I signed the divorce papers.” She paused.

“You were supposed to die. Only three more days,” her words trailed off. “Three more days, and it would have been over. You were supposed to die,” she moaned. Then her temper flared. “I hate God for the day he saved you!”

The words hit Robert hard. His mind reeled for a response. “No,” he spoke softly. “You can’t mean that.”

“Oh, but I do,” Eve’s eyes flared, becoming wide in fury. “I can’t take it anymore.” She paused. “Robert, I’ve had enough. You’re no good. You’re god is not helping you. You should curse him too.”

([despised](#): Isa 53:3-7, Heb 12:1-3. [Encourage](#) a friend.)

“No, Eve, no,” he pleaded. “I’m getting better,” he urged. “Please, please, I need more time.”

Eve was staring at the floor and made no response.

“Eve, please,” Robert continued to grovel. His words seemed inadequate. He began to feel light headed and weak in his knees. “I need a second chance.”

Robert stumbled to the nearest chair and fell inside its cold embrace. He watched as Eve paused, and then picked up the letter from the table. She looked at it intently for a long moment, and then threw it to the floor.

“I’m sorry,” she said softly. Then she stiffened her body, and turned to Robert with a new fury. “It’s over,” she shouted. She grabbed at her purse and darted toward the door. “I’m going to save myself.”

The door slammed hard and a picture on the wall fell to the hardwood floor. It was a family photograph, taken shortly after Stephen’s recovery from the RSV virus that hospitalized him as a baby. Stunned, Robert didn’t know what to do next.

He struggled to come back to his feet but then stumbled and fell to the floor. He reached for the picture that lie nearby, face down. Unable to reach it, Robert pushed against the floor to slide himself forward. He finally lunged ahead and grabbed at the picture. As he lifted it, broken pieces of glass spilled into his hand. He instinctively clinched his fist at the feeling of anger, but quickly sprung it open when

he felt a sharp pain. Blood was streaming across his palm and began dripping onto the floor. Robert was stunned, and stared in disbelief at the bloodied hand, broken glass, and gouged photograph.

The memory of his auto accident came crashing in, and he shuddered at the intense feeling accompanying it. He emptied his hand to distance himself from the broken glass and the painful memory that suddenly seemed very real and intense, bringing with it a reliving of the horrible experience.

"How much more can I bear," he wondered to himself. He looked long and hard at a shroud of glass broken to form a sharp point, and resembling a dagger. He felt that it had already been stabbed into his heart.

Although Robert would have welcomed the emotional relief, he could not cry. In an unpredictable instant, his mind suddenly reeled away from self-pity and remorse to consider instead a surge of raging anger. His ears were red and burning.

Emotions flooded upon this broken man as he sat on the floor of his foyer and contemplated the evidence of his shattered life. He placed the palms of his hands on the surface behind his back to support himself.

Robert closed his eyes and let a parade of evil ensuing thoughts press upon him, and then, just as quickly, his mind recoiled, proceeding

into a void of nothingness not known in physical reality. He continued to sit there, his head bowed, his mind spinning. Slowly the evil presence of hatred and revenge eased away from him. It was like he had been buried alive, and then slowly uncovered to be resurrected from the grave. But, what had saved him?

Sensing a change, something happening in the spiritual realm unseen, Robert continued to wait, in anticipation of what would come next, whether it was hurtful or healing, good or bad. Slowly, a calming peace settled upon his soul. Although his heart was aching, a stronger spirit, one of assurance was making an entry into his mind. Robert could not understand its coming. At first he rejected the thought, but it persisted. He waited a little longer, and quietness came. Robert wondered what this meant.

([tempted](#): 1Pe 5:8, 1Co 10:13, Heb 2:18, 1Pe 5:6-7. [Encourage](#) a friend.)

Slowly he picked himself up and again noticed his wounded hand. He proceeded to the powder room in search of disinfectant and a bandage. After dressing his cut, he returned to clean up the mess. Robert carefully retrieved the photo, and although damaged, it was still framed. He placed it upon the wall, in its former place of cheerful greeting. He began to feel a little better, and then a sense of reassurance

came upon him. He paused to reflect upon himself, and what had just happened, but decided instead to finish his task and to then retreat to his bedroom. Robert was feeling weak and light-headed again. He welcomed and needed the escape of sleep.

Morning came despite Robert not wanting to see another day. He lay in bed, wondering what had transpired during the night, remembering the horrific words shouted at him the day before.

“Stephen!” he suddenly remembered that he should not be alone. He had fought with Eve after his son had been tucked in bed and fell asleep.

Robert looked at the clock on the stand nearby. It was 9:10 AM. *“Why had he not heard from Stephen?”* He had forgotten to set the alarm.

He lunged forward and was wrenched by pain. *“Where is Stephen?”* he persisted as he struggled to place his feet on the floor.

Robert stumbled down the hallway to Stephen’s room. It was empty. He called for Eve. There was no answer.

“Where did she take him?” he asked himself. “Is he OK?”

Robert found his cell phone downstairs and reluctantly called his in-law’s home. He had not talked to them much lately, knowing that Eve

was confessing her feelings to them, and they were persuaded against him.

The phone rang persistently. Finally, there was an answer.

“Hello.”

Robert quickly responded, “Hello,” but then realized that the other voice continued without pause.

“We cannot take your call now,” it said. “Please leave a message.”

“This is Robert!” he continued. “Eve and Stephen are not here,” he swallowed hard. “I accidentally slept in,” he offered in explanation, and wondering if he divulged too much to someone who might not need to be involved.

“Is Stephen with you?” he asked. “I just need to know that he is OK,” he pleaded.

Ten minutes later his phone rang. Robert had been stewing about other possible scenarios and was becoming increasingly anxious.

He answered quickly.

“Robert, this is your mother-in-law,” a stern voice reported.

“Stephen is here, and he is fine.”

“Oh, good.” Robert managed a reply. “Is Eve there too... Can I talk to her.”

There was a long pause and silence.

“Hello,” Robert inquired. “Are you still there?”

“Yes, she is here,” was the softly spoken answer. “But she is getting ready for work, and doesn’t want to talk to you.”

“But I need...” Robert quickly interjected, before hearing a click and the dial tone.

Robert sat down deep in thought. *“OK, Stephen’s OK. They take good care of him,”* he reassured himself. He waited for clarity. *“Eve is still going to work. That’s good,”* he reasoned. *“She needs some time for herself. She will come back, I just know that she will.”* He felt his heart beat slower as some of the anxiety eased away. *“But what if,”* and he caught himself in the middle of the fearful suggestion. *“No, I won’t go there now.”*

The light inside the house dimmed as a dense cloud covered the sun outside. Suddenly the walls moved in closer and Robert felt the confinement of a place that felt hostile and threatening. *“I need to get out of here too,”* he told himself. He went to his desk and picked up the wireless bill with the number he circled the day before. He called and

heard the familiar voice of his friend John. He would meet him within the hour. He got directions to his home.

10. Confession –

Wright's Life Exposed

John Wright lived on the other side of town, in a rural area that Love had seldom visited. After several turns on side roads he saw the sign for “Glendale,” and made a sharp right. He was driving slower now, looking for house number 56. He spotted an odd number on the left, and reasoned that Wright’s home would be on the right, the opposite side. In a glance he saw the number 52 designated on a yard sign. Robert passed a stand that supported several mailboxes and then quickly hit his brakes. He put the shifter in reverse and backed up until he was alongside the boxes. There in the middle was a silver mailbox with the faded number 56 painted in red numerals on its side. Robert backed up some more and came upon a dirt lane that went into the trees. He peered through the passenger side window, leaning in that direction as far as his shoulder harness would allow. He saw several small homes hidden under the

canopy of giant oaks. They were nearly obscure due to the evergreens that surrounded them. He proceeded up the lane. John lived in the second house on the left.

There it was, a modest ranch style house. Being a realtor, Robert knew the various styles well and recognized this one as a doublewide modular home. He observed thick moss growing on the roof, evidence of age and neglect, although it was difficult to prevent it in a shaded lot such as this. He recognized Wright's vehicle, as he remembered seeing it in the church parking lot. It was the same Ford without the tailgate. That was the first time they conversed with each other.

Robert felt some excitement as he anticipated meeting his friend. Much had transpired since their last talk.

After placing the shifter in park, he reached for his cane, but hesitated. *"Do I really need this?"* he asked himself. *"Do I want him to see me as disabled?"*

Robert decided not to serve the image of his prideful former self, and grabbed the cane after opening his car door. The pathway to the house was broken concrete and flagstone and he suddenly was glad that he had his cane for support. Certainly, he didn't want to fall on John's property.

The steps were old 2x6's, now gray and damp, also covered with a slippery film of fungus. Robert grasped for the railing, a treated 2x4, in the same condition. He felt the slime on his fingertips.

Finally reaching the uncovered door, he pressed the doorbell button, which was unlit. He listened intently but heard no sound from within. Robert shifted and placed his cane in his other hand, and then pressed the button again. For a moment, Robert wondered if he could have made a mistake and had come to the wrong place. Then he heard a noise from within. It was a door slammed, then a dog barking. He heard the animal jumping about and thought the floor was shaking, but realized that the small deck on which he stood was not attached to the house. He feared that a large dog might jump upon him as he entered.

Robert heard a voice, then another door closing within. A minute later the front door at which he stood sprung open. There was John Wright smiling broadly.

“Robert, welcome. Please come in.” John looked into the eyes of his visitor and offered a welcoming gaze.

Robert immediately felt a slight intrusion, as if John was already seeing into his soul. But his eyes danced with delight so Robert stepped forward, to his open arms, and embraced his friend.

“I read about your accident,” John said as his eyes glistened. “I felt so bad for you, and, I never stopped praying for you.”

“Yes, a lot has happened since I last saw you,” Robert confirmed.

John led his friend to a table that was pushed against the kitchen wall and in a welcoming gesture pulled out a chair for his guest.

Robert looked around briefly. The house was dark, and although modest in every way, it seemed to have a pleasant, warm feeling about it. The kitchen was clean, the counter tops were bare, and he noticed a few dishes sitting in the stainless steel sink.

“Do you live here alone,” Robert nearly blurted, and then felt embarrassed at his forward inquiry. “You never talked about your home, or your family.”

“Yes, it’s just me and my companion, ‘King.’ He is a lab mix. Man’s best friend, you know. I put him in the bedroom so that he would not bother you with his nosing around. He is friendly and loveable, but we don’t get many visitors, and King gets too excited.”

Robert paused and offered a warm smile in return. “Great place you have here.”

The two men talked for many hours. Robert shared the recent events of his life, those that occurred after their last meeting. He told

John about the song on the radio that broke him, his visit to the park and his prayer of submission in realizing his need for God. There was the beam of light that descended, the surge of energy that nearly shocked his body, and the overwhelming peace that settled upon him. Next, it was the crash, his awakening to see a nurse at his side, her surprise, and his learning that he was nearly was euthanized. It would have been considered a mercy killing.

John listened intently, hanging on his every word. He would nod, smile wide, and bob in his chair. His excitement was evident.

“Wow, what a testimony!” he inserted when Love concluded the account of his last months. “I knew that God was doing something wonderful in your life.” He paused and a tear came to his left eye. “I am so happy for you, my friend. This is such a beautiful thing, answers to my prayers.”

John looked squarely at Robert and waited for their eyes to meet. “God has a purpose for your life. He has plans for you,” he offered in challenge and affirmation.

Robert looked down quickly, feeling the most recent pain of Eve’s words and being reminded of his present situation. Then the accusatory thought returned that made him again confront in his mind the awareness of his injuries and resulting disability, even though it may be

temporary. He wondered if he should share the present, negative part of his life and struggle. Instead, he chose to shift the attention of the conversation to John.

He had gotten up and went to the refrigerator, returning with two cans of diet coke. He offered one to Robert and settled in once more.

Robert saw his chance.

“John,” he asked. “Is it hard to live alone?”

Wright was a little surprised at the question but welcomed the opportunity to share his story.

“Yes, at times,” and he paused to gather his thoughts. “My wife left me and we divorced about 35 years ago,” he explained. “I still hold on to the hope of being reunited with them.”

“Them?” Robert observed in response.

“Yes, I have a son. He went with his mother. I deserved it. I was a boozier and philanderer in those days,” he explained. “That was before I knew the Lord.”

“Did she remarry?” Robert pried a little deeper.

“No, never did,” John answered matter-of-factly.

“Then why...” Robert pressed on.

“After accepting Jesus, my life really changed,” Wright explained. “I pursued them, of course. But they said my religion was a

fraud, and my son Jimmy seemed to hate it the most, especially as he became a teenager and rebelled against authority. He lives like I did. He's an alcoholic and loves his party life. He rejects me for the conviction he feels. I used to be like that." John paused. "I haven't seen them now for a couple of years. But, I've always wanted to make it up to them. I live modestly so that I can leave something to them." John paused to regain his composure and concluded with the confession, "I still want them back, and when I'm gone, I hope to leave something for them, especially for my son."

This last statement seemed unfitting to Robert. He looked at John who sat at the other end of the table. He was now illuminated by sunlight that streamed in through the window above the kitchen sink. Robert looked intently. Yes, Wright looked different today. He looked older, not as fit, and when he wasn't smiling, Robert noticed bags under his eyes.

John noticed the examination and interrupted Robert's thoughts.

"I'm sorry about your injuries, and the physical challenge you face, Robert," he said. "God's grace is enough. But I must confess, now I too have an illness to face."

Robert was stunned as he realized that his perception was correct and that his concern was legitimate.

Wright went on to detail the last three months of his life. He had been diagnosed with bladder cancer, it was advanced, and had spread to his liver. He was undergoing chemotherapy and radiation treatments and his prognosis was good. The tumor on his liver had shrunk considerably.

“I’m going to beat this,” John exclaimed. “My local doctor is good, but I just read about a new procedure that they are doing at the Cancer Treatment Center in Baltimore. I’m going to get myself down there. I know that they can cure me.”

Love was stunned at the confession, but felt some inspiration at the same time, seeing John’s confidence and determination.

“You know that I will pray for you,” he offered, with a strongly motivated sincerity that he felt rise from deep within.

Robert stopped talking to reflect briefly on himself, and his friend, and how they had both changed since their last meeting at the State Room. He felt nearly overwhelmed by the sadness that came. Suddenly he knew that his honest confession was required.

“John, it’s hard,” he noted. “I’m really struggling.”

“There will be struggles in this life,” Wright replied. “But we must press on.”

“I know, I know,” Robert’s words trailed away from the conversation. “I still have hope.”

“Jesus is my hope,” Wright declared. He looked at his friend and waited for his affirmation, but none came.

“Robert,” Wright addressed him directly to get his full attention. “You are different now. Remember our first meeting in the parking lot at church? You questioned God’s goodness.”

“Yes,” was Robert’s simple response.

“I explained that you were a victim of the power and influence of evil, a pawn on the chessboard of life.”

“I remember,” Love said.

“You are no longer a pawn. You are now a prince, a prince that is an heir of the King. You are protected, and powerful.”

([inheritance](#): Gal 4:4-7, Rom 8:35-39. [Share](#) with a friend.)

“How do I have such power?” Robert asked bluntly.

“It is grace,” Wright replied. “It is God’s abiding presence, His Spirit, that enables and empowers us to be victorious in our life struggles. It is strength from within, and a focused mind that knows His peace when temptation and doubt try to steal the goodness of God, our Savior, from us.”

([empowered](#): 1Jo 4:4, Zec 4:6, Eph 3:16, 2Pe 1:3, Eph 1:19, 20, 6:10, Phi 4:13. [Encourage](#) a friend.)

([trinity](#): Joh 15:26, 16:13. [Encourage](#) a friend.)

“I know the evil thought,” Robert confessed.

“Yes, they still come. The battle between the flesh and the spirit continues. They are contrary and opposed to each other. Robert, you must learn to rely on God and to deny yourself.”

“How?” Love asked.

“By prayer and meditation,” Wright affirmed. “We no longer live for ourselves, or for our selfish needs, but God leads us to live in generosity towards others.”

John paused to allow Robert back into the conversation, but his companion made no reply.

“Robert, this is not religion, it’s relationship. Like those we know in this life, we need to spend time talking to God, to be intimate with him. You will know Him as a faithful friend and as a helper in your time of need. But you must relinquish your former life and the claim of self.” Wright paused. “Have you sensed His presence?” he asked, needing to hear Robert’s confession of faith reaffirmed.

“Yes,” Love offered the assurance sought. “When things are at their worst, when I feel nearly overwhelmed with fear, anger, or discouragement... it is then that I sense a peace that is beyond myself, and I know that it is God.”

([salvation](#): Psa 91:14-16, Luk 19:10, Joh 10:10, Mat 11:28-29.

[Encourage](#) a friend.)

“Ah yes, my friend, that’s right. God is faithful to his sons. We have been adopted into the family of God, with the full rights of sons, and a complete inheritance.”

([adopted](#): Rom 8:12-17, 1Pe 1:3-5, 1Jo 3:1-2: [Encourage](#) a friend.)

John asked if he could lead them in a prayer.

Robert consented, closed his eyes, bowed his head, and opened his heart.

During the prayer, a sense of affirmation, and comfort came upon Love. He felt that his spirit was renewed and that his strength was restored.

Robert realized that it was time for him to leave and felt saddened at the pending separation. They exchanged telephone numbers, promised to meet again soon, and the two men hugged once more.

Wright held Love close, in a tight embrace, and patted his back. Love felt his strength, and strangely, it was if something unknown to Love transpired, or transferred between the two of them. When he was released, Love looked to the face of his mentor and friend and saw tears streaming down his cheeks.

11. Loss

Two weeks later, Robert received a phone call that startled him awake. He was waiting for Eve and Stephen to come home. He had been reading his Bible in a recliner and fell asleep.

Following their big blow-up, she returned home after being away for three days, but Eve was spending less time at home now, staying out late at night and doing so more frequently. Also, she was asking others to watch Stephen more often.

Robert had to accept the nearly constant shun. Arguing made things worse. Today, he didn't know where Stephen was, and felt the pain of their separation. He truly desired to be a good father, and cared deeply for his son. He didn't want to lose him, and secretly wondered if he could bear the pain and loneliness of a long-term separation.

He often reflected on the account of John Wright's life and divorce and was determined not to end up the same way.

Robert decided not to be critical of his wife, or her lifestyle. He understood that she was hurting, and searching, much as he had done before his accident. He didn't push his faith on her, or try to force her to accept his beliefs. But things weren't getting better, and in fact, he had to admit to himself that they were obviously getting much worse.

Robert expected this phone call to inform him of her return, or Stephen's whereabouts, although that courtesy was seldom provided these days. She simply walked through the front door, slammed it behind her, dropped her purse in the middle of the floor, and tossed her jacket toward the couch. Stephen's things were also strewn about.

She would then yell for Robert and demand that he immediately cared for the needs of the crying child, while muttering criticisms under her breath. She then changed or freshened up quickly and made for a fast exit, without an accounting of her destination. Robert didn't know when she would return, and didn't expect to see her again until after her shift, the following day.

The divorce seemed to be on hold, as Robert had not been served any papers formally. He wondered about Eve's intentions in that regard, but lacked the courage to address the question directly to her. He wanted to avoid confrontation. Secretly, he hoped and prayed that his marriage would be saved, and pushed himself each day to improve physically. He

even talked to his broker about taking a job at the office, primarily as a receptionist. As a license holder he could bring an advantage to the front desk. Others in the office feared that he would steal all the leads, and take their potential clients. Aware of their complaint, Robert promised that he would not be practicing, as he was unable to make appointments and conduct showings. The job offered hourly pay, was part-time, and had no benefits. *“But it would help,”* he reasoned to himself. *“And, it’s a start.”* He had to wait for the position to open up.

Upon answering the phone he encountered a stranger who introduced himself simply as Tim. He was a good friend of John’s and had been given Robert’s phone number. Wright had suggested that they should connect and that they would become good friends. Tim apologized for not calling sooner, but he wanted Robert to know that John had taken a turn for the worse, and that he was now in the hospital. It was bad news, hitting Robert hard, in the delicate place where he clung to fraying strands of hope, which he received from his mentor’s advice. *“Why does it have to be John,”* he wondered.

As he entered the hospital, a familiarity with the place, the things he wanted to forget completely, came back to Love with a smothering sense, and it attempted to bring grief and remorse to his mind. He had

been trapped there for a long time. The smells, the dim lights, the sounds, and the anxiety that lingered there, were all too familiar to him.

Robert inquired at the front desk for John Wright. An elderly woman paused with recognition of the visitor. “Well hello, Mr. Love. How are you doing?”

“Better every day,” he quickly answered and hoped for the room number.

“That crash was a bad one,” she reminded him. “We were all surprised when you made it.”

“Yes ma’am,” he was curt in his reply. “I appreciate your concern. But the room number, please.”

A bit taken back by his impatience and unwillingness to be cordial, she quickly typed something on the computer keyboard.

“Yes, Wright,” she answered. “He’s in room 416.”

“Thank you,” Robert responded, and quickly turned away.

The receptionist watched him as he began to limp, a little unsteady on his cane, and quickly had remorse for the harsh feeling she felt just then, toward this man who had endured so much suffering.

“Robert,” she called after him. “I’m still rooting for you.”

Love had become weary of strangers who were constantly well wishing. Often it seemed that they sought information, which was more

important to them, as they lacked any sincere concern for his welfare.

He made no reply to her and continued toward the elevator.

“I hate this place,” he tried to calm his nerves. *“He’s even on my floor. I hope I don’t have to visit with my nurses.”*

Love was suddenly stunned at his selfish behavior. *“Sorry Lord,”* he prayed silently. *“I’m here for John. I pray that you heal him and bless him.”*

Upon exiting the elevator, Robert was quickly relieved to see that room 416 was in the opposite direction from his room, the place of his languishing recovery.

As he approached Wright’s room he heard a strange sound. It was voices, joined in a song. Nearly stunned by this unusual and unexpected display of joyfulness, he stopped to observe from a distance. He wondered what could be happening. It seemed so inappropriate.

The door was wide open. He could see John sitting up in the bed, propped up by his pillows. He seemed jubilant as he sang loudly with enthusiasm. The sight of it was confusing to Love.

At the end of his bed stood an elderly gentleman. He was distinguished looking, wore a black suit, and held a Bible in his hand. It was opened, and a ribbon dangled from the front of the book’s binding.

Robert recognized the song they sang. It was an old hymn that he had heard his grandmother sing on special occasions - she was from his mother's side. The song's title he recalled as, "In the Garden."

He recognized the lyrics. "He walks with me, and He talks with me, and He tells me I am His own. And the joy we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known."

"Are they having church?" he questioned to himself.

It seemed to be a sacred moment, one that should not be disturbed. So, Love lingered in his place in the hallway.

There was a stranger, a younger man, standing alongside the bed, and leaning on the bed rail. He wasn't singing. Sitting on the edge of the bed was a woman. Robert couldn't make out much about her. She had her back toward him.

"John has company," he told himself. *"I shouldn't intrude upon them now."*

Again he noticed the patient, the man who smiled and sang in disregard of who might be hearing him or observing his actions. He looked the picture of health. He even had a glow about him.

As Love pondered these things, almost oblivious to his immediate surroundings, he felt the touch of a hand on his shoulder and was jarred back to an awareness of his standing in the hallway.

Then he saw a man wearing jeans and a sweatshirt. He had hair that was too long to be controlled by a comb, and sported a two-day old beard. A bit taken aback by the stranger's surprise appearance, Robert quickly said, "Oh, please excuse me."

He didn't seem to be put off, but smiled and offered his hand in acquaintance. "I'm guessing that you are Robert Love. John has told me so much about you."

"Yes," he admitted cautiously. "And who might you be?" he inquired.

"Tim! I'm Tim. I talked to you on the phone."

"Oh yes," Robert answered, leaving his defenses down a little bit. "I came to see John," but that was obvious. Slightly embarrassed, he felt the need to command the situation and quickly posed two questions.

"What is going on? And, who are those people?"

"I see that John has some visitors," Tim offered in explanation of what was already known. He looked toward the room and paused. "That is Pastor Charles Morden, the man that taught John for many years. He must have come in from Raystown, and that's a three-hour drive."

"John seems to be happy," Robert observed.

"Yeah," Tim confirmed. "Pastor Charlie means a lot to John. Charlie was his mentor during his tough times."

“Did you know John then?” Robert asked when the opportunity presented itself.

“A little,” Tim explained. “We lived in the same town.” He paused in reflection and a smile changed his previous expression that showed concern. “See those other people, that boy and the woman in there?” he asked.

“I sure do,” Robert answered.

“That’s his ex-wife, and his son!” he exclaimed. “I know that John is happy to see them.”

“Oh, I understand now,” Robert said as he continued to consider the event that he saw unfolding before him. “Why did they come?” he asked, thinking aloud.

“Not sure, but it seems to be good,” Tim reasoned as he watched also.

Then the two men stood silently, side by side, as they hoped for healing for their friend.

The pastor looked to his Bible and began to read.

“Are you going in?” Tim asked, sensing that Robert was about to leave.

“No, I don’t think so.” Robert responded. “This looks like it should be a private meeting. But I am glad to see John looking so good,” he concluded. “Will you tell him that I was here?”

“Sure,” Tim answered promptly. “But...” He paused as he began to ask the question. Robert had already turned and was walking away. Tim watched as he leaned on his cane and slid his right foot forward to complete the step.

Three days passed as Robert waited for another opportunity to return to the hospital to visit with John. Eve was seen little during that time, and Robert was busy caring for Stephen.

Not liking to cook, Robert depended on the microwave oven for their meals. Stephen liked hot dogs and macaroni with cheese. That and cheese sandwiches were their normal fare, and Robert was becoming increasingly concerned that the diet he provided was not balanced or healthy for his son. He could sense when Stephen was nutrient deficient. He would get a spot, or more so, it was a circle that darkened under his eyes. Robert was then determined to force a vegetable into his son’s stomach, even if it was only a piece of celery filled with peanut butter. Eventually he discovered that Stephen liked cauliflower. It was seldom available though, as Eve wouldn’t purchase it during her grocery-

shopping trips, despite Robert's frequent requests. She bought almost nothing for him, and Robert didn't expect her to cater to the one she despised. It was for Stephen, but likely she had not understood that. Still, Robert wondered why she didn't seem to care about her son's diet.

When his phone rang, Robert answered despite not recognizing the number displayed. It was a familiar voice though. It was Tim, the disheveled man he had met at the hospital.

"Robert, I'm calling because John got worse."

"How bad is he?" Love asked instinctively.

"I'm not sure, but we are gathering at his house to pray for a miracle."

"When?"

Tim answered, "At about 3, this afternoon."

Robert quickly looked at his wristwatch. It was now 1 PM and he had not heard from or seen his wife or son since yesterday morning. They had not come home last night. He hesitated because of this uncertainty, but then committed himself to pray for his dear friend.

"I'll be there," he said. "But Tim, what do you know about his condition?"

"All I can tell you is what Jay told me," he explained.

"Supposedly, the doctors had a consult with John and his family."

“You mean his ex-wife?” Love interrupted.

“Yeah, right, and his son. The doctor said there wasn’t anything more he could do to help John, and that the end was inevitable,” Tim lamented. “He suggested that they call hospice, and his family agreed.”

“But what about John?” Love interjected. “What did he say?”

Tim noted, “John said that was OK with him, that he wanted to go home, to be with Jesus, that is.”

Robert’s body suddenly shook at the words he heard. Fear was getting a hold on him. “I’ll see you there,” he said in goodbye.

As Robert slowly turned onto Glendale Road he saw cars parked along the shoulder of the roadway. Not wanting to walk too far he pressed ahead.

As he pulled into John’s driveway he saw a small gathering of about twenty people loitering near the front porch. He edged his car off the driveway onto the lawn, hoping it would not sink into the ground.

The only person Robert recognized was Tim. He said hello, shook his hand quickly, and made his request.

“Do you think its OK if I go in to see John?” he asked.

Tim shook his head firmly to answer in the negative. “His family is in there with him and they do not want to be disturbed,” he

explained. “They said that they won’t let anyone in, and asked that we respect their privacy.”

Robert sighed, realizing that he should have introduced himself to them at the hospital, when he saw them there. Then he noticed a van parked off to the side of the house, near a side entrance door. It was boldly lettered to announce the business it represented, and intended to promote. “LifeSong Hospice,” it read. “Surround them with love.”

Feeling helpless, Robert sought for a place to sit and walked through the gathering. They were united in small groups, three, four, or five and stood to form small circles. Their hands were joined, heads were bowed and one person in each group prayed aloud. They pleaded with God to spare the life of John Wright.

Love was suddenly stunned at the realization of what was happening. He remembered his grandmother, and then thought about the syringe of morphine that hung from the IV at his bedside.

Now, it was John’s turn.

“How could this be happening again?” he asked himself.

“Don’t they know what they are doing to John in there?”

Like a soldier, he felt the sudden urge and desire to charge ahead and raid the fortress that held his friend captive. It would be a rescue to set him free. But he knew that wasn't possible.

"This is a farce!" he shouted within. *"Here they are outside, praying for a miracle, while inside the house he is being purposely terminated,"* and he became angry. *"This doesn't make any sense."*

Love sought for a person to consult, or for someone who would console him. He wanted to hear someone speak to rebuke and redefine the evidence he saw. *"Tell me that I am wrong. Please! Someone tell me."* Robert desired to be misinformed. He simply wanted to be wrong.

But, no comfort came. Instead, his anger increased.

Robert walked back to his car. He refused to participate in prayers that denied the obvious truth of what was really happening. Once inside his car, he paused to try to understand the swift turn in events that had so quickly brought his friend to this place of doom. John had said he would beat the disease, and desired to visit the cancer center in Baltimore. *"Why did he change his mind?"* Love wondered.

Then he thought about John's lost family. He remembered his desire to leave something for them. *"Is that why they are here now?"* he asked himself. He continued to focus on the sudden appearance of John's

ex-wife and the son who previously would have nothing to do with his father.

Starting his car he noticed that Tim was watching. *“He won’t understand,”* Love reasoned. He put his car in reverse and narrowly missed hitting a tree sapling.

As he drove back toward his home, his eyes filled with tears and blurred. He blinked hard and squinted to clear his vision. Robert’s mind was racing. His pulse was quicker now and his face burned.

Then Robert remembered a conversation he had with John at the diner. It was the third and last time he met John there. Robert went for breakfast and found him, but John wasn’t eating. He only had a coffee. Robert had considered it a huge sacrifice, considering how good their food was, and didn’t fully comprehend its meaning at the time. John said he was on a diet.

“That’s it.” The insurance,” he informed himself. *“John said that he was fasting for a physical, for a life insurance policy. He was trying to get off his medications so he would pass their test.”*

“Oh my God,” Robert blurted in distress. “They’re after the money.”

“Oh John,” he shouted as if his friend could hear his pleading. “Don’t let them do it. Your life is worth so much more!”

12. The Attack

As John approached his neighborhood he noticed a strange color in the darkening sky. It couldn't be the sun, which had set earlier without display. He turned the corner to his street and started up the hill to his house.

Now he could see the strobe lights bouncing and reflecting off of neighboring houses. A man in uniform stepped in front of his vehicle to stop him.

Feeling panic, Robert rolled down his window.

"Sorry, you can't go any further. Turn there," he instructed and pointed to an adjoining street.

"What's going on?" Robert quickly inquired.

"A house fire. Fully engulfed. You have to turn here."

Robert looked ahead and began counting the houses in front of him, all very familiar, yet strangely alien in this setting. Many times he

told potential visitors, usually home health nurses, how many houses they would pass beyond this intersection before finding his own.

“Oh my God, it’s my house,” he suddenly blurted.

The fire policeman looked stunned.

“I have to get home.”

“No, they need room to work,” the stranger demanded.

“But I can’t walk that far,” Robert argued, his voice sounding alarmed. He motioned toward his cane resting on the seat next to him.

The man looked at Robert, studied his face, and then glanced toward the cane. He paused.

“What’s your home address,” the man inquired with suspicion.

“I live in number 115,” Robert responded without delay.

The man suddenly turned white and become apologetic. “Man, I’m sorry,” and he paused and then spoke into his handheld radio.

“I have a man here who claims to be the owner,” Robert overheard him saying. “OK, I’ll send him up.”

“OK, proceed up the street,” he instructed. “Another firemen will show you where to park. But be careful!”

The sudden realization, confirmation of the thought he feared so greatly, suddenly came down, crashing upon him with great intensity,

and Robert stomped on the accelerator, nearly driving over the foot of the man who stood alongside his car. He was beginning to tremble.

Within seconds, another man wearing a long black coat and a yellow helmet stepped in front of his car, his hand held forward. It was a good thing that he wore wide reflective stripes of material on his coat, or in his panic, Robert may not have seen him.

He leaned toward the car and the still opened window. “Mr. Love?” he inquired.

Robert nodded in the affirmative as he stared ahead. The scene before him consumed his mind. It was surreal, as if he was seeing into an unknown reality, perhaps into another world, or time. Surely the nerve endings in his brain were sparking with short-circuits. Robert was losing full comprehension.

Now he saw a tanker truck, engine No. 4, parked in front of his house. Large hoses were attached to its rear and water dripped from the chrome fittings quickly attached by hand with turn handles. On the other side of the road a crowd of locals had gathered to watch in disbelief. A bright yellow light was reflecting upon the faces of the observers, as they stood there, motionless. That light was coming from the giant flame that consumed Robert’s home, all his belongings, and his life, as he presently knew it.

“Mr. Love?” he asked again. “Was anyone in the house?” he attempted to pry into a mind stunned by the sights and sounds, and overwhelmed by fear.

Robert pushed his vehicle’s door open and hit the legs of the fireman. He attempted to exit his car, but stumbled and fell into the weeds that protruded into the small space provided by the narrowly opened door.

He sprung up quickly, surprised at his sudden strength and agility, as adrenaline and nearly supernatural power overwhelmed him. Still, he had an awareness to grab for his cane in hope of preventing another stumble. His pants were torn; his leg was scraped and bleeding.

He pushed against the fireman, ignoring his inquiry, as if in a trance, something was drawing him to the flames.

Near the edge of his front lawn, another fireman grabbed hold of his arm. This man, who appeared to be commanding the effort to control the blaze, surely meant business. His grip was firm, unyielding, and sufficiently demanding to halt Robert’s intrusion.

Robert yielded unwillingly to the new authority, leaned on his cane, and dropped it. Nearby he saw utility workers in a panic. They were digging in his grass with a shovel. Suddenly one approached.

“Where is the gas shutoff?” he yelled at Robert who stood there expressionless. Robert wasn’t hearing him.

Suddenly the flames flared. Robert saw a bright light behind the upstairs windows. This was Stephen’s playroom. As he attempted to peer within, it was as if the smoldering structure suddenly became alive. It danced before him, puffing out smoke and fumes, hating the earth and all life sustained by it.

Nearby trees were scorched and hissed in response to the flames that licked at them, causing them to shrivel and quickly disappear.

The window lights flickered as if they were eyes infuriated, framed by a forehead designated by the disappearing roofline. Flames began to shoot up, through the melting shingles.

Robert heard laughter, subtle at first. “*Ha, Ha!, Ha!!*” the evil voice exclaimed to his overwhelmed and diminishing mind. It came again, this time much louder, demanding, threatening, and mercilessly proclaiming its victory.

It was an evil, haunting sound, worse than that of any demon Robert had ever heard portrayed in the movies. The heat was intense on his forehead and burned his skin, turning it bright red. Sweat was streaming down his face. Smoke and fumes burned in his eyes and throat. He coughed and cried, as he shook and trembled with fear.

The eyes of the evil one grew even brighter as if they observed Robert's distress with pleasure. His archenemy, this attacker, intended to destroy this man, who just then thought he saw something or someone moving within the inferno. Again, he heard the haunting cry of maddening joust. Suddenly the windows exploded, throwing daggers of broken glass directly at Robert. They fell at his feet, just short of penetrating his body.

It was more than Love could bear.

([attacked](#): 1Pe 5:8, Heb 2:14-15, Jam 4:7. [Encourage](#) a friend.)

Robert stiffened abruptly at the surging pain he felt as it struck at him. First it exploded in his left arm, but then it quickly traveled into his chest. He felt as if his heart had burst within. His knees buckled and he dropped to the ground. The fireman, still holding his elbow, yanked him upward, and grabbed for his waist. He yelled for EMS.

Love was gone, but where he had gone, or was taken, was yet to be determined.

Robert lost consciousness.

There seemed to be panic rising everywhere. Firemen still darted nearby with hoses and shouted at each other. An ambulance blurred twice in warning as it came from the way Robert had come. A

wailing firetruck from another company approached from the opposite direction, its strobe lights nearly blinding the bystanders. Two men ran quickly toward Robert and the fireman who held him. All were covered in a spray of water. Alongside them another fireman opened a nozzle and white foam spouted out of its end, falling short of its intended target.

Chaos was beginning to prevail. A neighbor, who recognized Robert and stood on the other side of the road behind him, began crying.

Her sobs were audible over all else. She mourned Love's loss.

The wind began to blow that night. It was a gentle breeze at first. At 115 Elder Street it fanned the embers in the pile of smoldering wood, the ruins of the Love residence. A few sparks jumped into the air and floated upward, seemingly without a course or intended destination. But there was something more in the air. As the breeze turned into a steady wind, something came, undetected. Atmospheric conditions changed.

Robert lay in the narrow bed in the emergency room, waiting for test results. He had not yet heard from Eve, but was assured by a nurse that she had reached his wife on her cell phone. From where he lay, Robert could see the nurses' station, as his front curtain remained open half way. He overheard only some of their words. This annoyed him

somewhat, as he felt exposed and although he desired more privacy, he was also grateful to be able to see beyond the small cloth cubical that contained him. In this space he felt claustrophobic.

Suddenly a short, bald headed man popped into his space, startling Love, whose mind was consumed with worry and whose thoughts drifted away all too suddenly. Robert had been struggling to concentrate on the many questions that confronted him, unable to find immediate answers.

“Robert,” he introduced himself, “I’m Doctor Hopkins.”

He looked at his patient in a discerning way with pause.

“How are you feeling?” the doctor asked.

“I think I’m OK,” Robert offered. “The pain is gone.”

“You’ve been through a lot today, my friend,” the doctor suggested. He looked at the chart he held in his left hand.

“Well,” he continued, “The good news is that we don’t see anything wrong with your heart.” He paused to see the effect of the news on his patient. When Robert did not respond, he continued, “I think that you suffered a panic attack.”

“Oh,” was all Robert was able to make in response.

“That’s understandable,” Hopkins affirmed. “And, I’m sorry for your loss.”

Robert simply stared off into the distance, a place unknown.

“Your wife and son are OK. You know that, right?”

“Yes,” Robert answered. “The nurse told me.”

The doctor paused and watched his patient for a long moment.

He heard the wind howling outside.

“Well, I want to keep you here tonight for observation,” he suggested.

Robert nodded in affirmation.

“Do you need anything else?” Dr. Hopkins offered, as he wrote in the chart.

“I’m worried for my friend,” Robert suddenly blurted, his mind finding a base thought.

“What do you mean?” Hopkins asked.

“He’s sick. Cancer. I was at his home this afternoon and they began palliative care,” Robert explained. “I don’t think he’s that sick.”

“I don’t think this should concern us,” the doctor responded quickly.

“His name is John Wright,” Robert was urged to quickly reveal.

Hopkins lifted his head and Robert saw his expression change.

First there was recognition, then concern.

“I know him,” he replied. “He was here recently.”

“Is he that bad?” Robert pried.

“I can’t say, but I’m surprised at what you tell me,” the doctor reasoned. “You shouldn’t worry about it.”

Hopkins quickly turned away. Robert watched as he approached the nurses’ station and stood in front of the counter at the desk. He strained, but Robert could not hear what he was saying. Then he saw a nurse hand the doctor a phone.

A door slammed nearby, feet shuffled, and Eve stepped into the emergency room with Stephen in tow. She stopped short of approaching his bedside and looked anxiously toward her husband.

Her emotions were as a loose cannon. They were written on her face that twitched between anger, fear, and relief. Robert waited to see which would be fired at him first.

He felt a surge of emotion and raised his hand toward her. Love reached for assurance and support.

But Eve stood in place and trembled slightly as she seemed unable to speak. “What did you do?” she finally demanded.

“I went back home... It was burning,” he stammered. “I didn’t know where you or Stephen was. I was so scared...” his words trailed off and he dropped his welcoming reach as his hand fell back to the mattress.

Before she could speak there was the scraping noise of metal on metal, curtain rings dragging, as a nurse appeared by yanking the fabric barrier back with a sudden jerk, as if she was mad at it, further exposing the room, Robert's private space. Stephen rolled a bouncy ball toward her, which she quickly bent down and caught with a smile.

"Well, you're a friendly one," she ventured. Looking at his parents she suddenly realized that she had interrupted a private moment.

"Can I take him out for a Popsicle?" she asked.

"That would be nice," Eve responded. "Thank you."

Stephen took the nurse's hand without hesitation and the two of them quickly disappeared.

Eve returned her attention to Robert. "I was afraid," she paused and tears moistened the corners of her eyes. "Afraid that you were in the house," her voice quivered.

"No, I was out," Robert answered and reached again for a tender touch.

Eve reluctantly stepped forward and leaned in to give Robert a loose embrace. He wished for much more.

"We're together. That's all that matters," Robert suggested with some uncertainty, but in great sincerity.

Eve quickly stood, regained her composure and began to retreat even as Robert sensed a cold chill coming from her.

Fear crossed her face and her eyes narrowed. “The fire, what about the fire?”

The wind howled outside as a tree branch banged against the window glass. It had begun to rain. The noise caught their attention and caused an interruption in the conversation.

Robert heard a mournful howl, as if nature was expressing sorrow for the loss of his life, even crying for him. Momentarily, Love was struck by a feeling of great sadness. He thought of their home, now a pile of charred timbers, sending off its final sparks, as the consuming fire smoldered and slowly died. Then he quivered as recent memories came flooding in. He again heard the sounds of the crash that nearly killed him, and saw a flashback of the ashen face of the nurse, startled when he suddenly returned from a long period of rest in an unconscious state. Robert knew that his life was changing and believed deeply that he had been saved for a reason. He believed in second chances.

He formed a slight grin. “It was time to move anyway,” he suggested.

Eve looked surprised.

“Hey, I know a good realtor,” he volunteered in jest.

But Eve did not share his attempt at comic relief and quickly looked away without an answer.

The next morning the sun shone brightly and the nursing staff seemed to be in better spirits, even chipper. Robert managed to get to his feet and wobbled over to the window. What he saw astonished him, and stirred something inside.

That night a misty rain, nearly undetectable, had fallen steadily as temperatures dropped quickly. A glistening coat of thin ice covered everything in view.

The sun danced on the tree limbs, revealing an intricate detail previously unnoticed. Water was already dripping as the sun again warmed the earth.

Robert was reminded of the promise of nature for renewal and regeneration. He felt inspired by the beauty that unfolded before his eyes and he was encouraged.

“God, are you still with us?” he asked softly.

Then Love heard the words of the Creator, “*Yes my son. I will never leave you nor forsake you.*”

([faithful](#): .Psa 145:13, 2Th 3:3, Psa 111:7-18, Deu 31:6, Heb 13:5. [Encourage](#) a friend.)

Robert leaned on the wall, needing to steady himself and continued to examine the beautiful garden displayed before him. It seemed to be made of fine glass, as clear as crystal. Light danced everywhere, it reflected and bounced from limb to limb, tree to tree. The sky was white and blue, with intense color.

Feeling strengthened within, he returned to his bed and sat on its edge. He was waiting for his doctor to visit that morning, and hoping for his discharge orders.

Just then the ring of his phone was so loud that it startled him. It was vibrating and wiggling on the nightstand next to him. He reached for it and offered an enthusiastic greeting, surprising even himself.

“Robert, is that you?”

“Yes, I’m OK,” he answered.

“It’s a miracle... a miracle!”

Stunned by the proclamation of joy, Love suddenly became vividly aware of his being.

“What?” was all he asked.

“It’s John,” Tim shouted in jubilation. “John Wright!”

“What are you telling me?”

“They came out this morning, put some equipment in their van and left all of a sudden. Quick like.”

“At first we feared the worst,” Tim explained. “Then came the news that John had survived the night. He’s going to make it!”

Love dropped the phone and it fell into his lap.

He began to realize how God had intervened, using the events of the previous day to save his friend. If Robert had not fallen ill and been taken to the hospital, he would not have met Doctor Hopkins. In recollection he saw the doctor standing there, at the desk, talking briskly into the phone.

Suddenly, a beam of light shone upon him. It came from the outside, traversing the barriers of time and space – physical and spiritual, penetrating the earth’s atmosphere in deliverance, arriving with a message of assurance and hope, it fully illuminated the face of Love.

Love had endured.

They were perfect strangers when they met, but allowed their lives to intersect and in the end each was instrumental in helping the other. But it was a greater Life, victorious in conquering death, a greater Love that truly saved them. The Savior had come.

For Robert Love this event was a marker in his life of increasing faith. Surely he would never forget the fire, and this event alone would change the course of his life forever. But more importantly, he had seen God work. The Almighty used circumstances intended for harm to save another person. Love's faith grew by leaps and bounds that day. His future was uncertain, and yet undetermined, but his spiritual compass was set and now sent him in a certain direction. He wondered what would happen next. Certainly, as you will see, it would not be a leisurely stroll through the proverbial garden of sweet smelling roses – but life had other punches, more hardship to throw at Love.

13. The Accusation – Hurt by a Church

Men of the cloth are protected by the church, an organization that claims to have the authority of Almighty God. Religious authority is to be feared. To openly and publically challenge a clergyman is perhaps a risky and foolish thing to do. Love's struggle with the actions of a particular pastor and his wife led to great austerity in prayer as he pleaded with God to know the truth. Love believed in the Church, widely, but sensed that this pastor, specifically, was way off track. He felt that he must defend himself, primarily for the sake of his son, but could he do so without offending God? Alone, as one already discredited, he was not up for the fight. He needed help.

The sun shone brightly through the cracks in the closed blind, flickering on Robert's face as he began to return from a deep sleep. Another day had dawned. He quickly sat up on the edge of the bed.

Today he felt hopeful, determined, and driven to accomplish the immediate task at hand. Today was Sunday.

His life had been in a downward spiral for the past three years. But Robert Love had survived the hardships and trials to come through on the other side with a strong spirit. He had grasped onto Hope and was holding on tightly. He believed he could rebuild his life now. As he thought about his son, Stephen, he felt purpose and resolve. He knew that his five-year-old needed his father.

Robert picked up the letter that laid on the nightstand. He looked at the words he penned two days earlier, and once again contemplated their intention. He wondered what can of worms he might be opening, yet believed that a confrontation with the church could no longer be avoided.

Previous years brought disaster, causing Robert to lose his job, experience a serious car accident, suffer debilitating physical injuries, nearly die in the hospital, and struggle through rehab. These hardships should have consumed and defined him negatively to change his life forever, but they had not. Temptation came with the message of despair, but grace abounded more. Love hoped for better times but they had not yet arrived. The struggle he was about to encounter would further define

God and lead Robert to better know His character, as the understanding gleaned from these experiences dissected between the claims of religion and the truth of a merciful God.

Most recently Robert faced the Judge in Orphans Court, fighting for the right to see his son, taken from him in divorce action. In the midst of it, his wife Eve, finally went to church with Robert after he pleaded with her since his accident to do so. Love expected to find healing for their failed marriage, and more specifically, encouragement for his wife. But the plan backfired, and now Eve was even more determined to win the legal battle she raged for everything they owned and to punish Robert by keeping his son away from him, strengthened by her new cohort, the pastor's wife.

Family disputes can linger for generations. Robert's great-grandfather had been a founder of this independent Bible church and had built the oak pulpit that was still being used there today. Robert's grandfather had clashed with another prominent family leader on a competitive business deal. In the end they both got a piece of the action, but harsh words were spoken for the profits lost to the other. His grandfather stopped attending church and would never step inside God's

house again. His father had tried to establish a place for himself in the church and eventually left to attend another, quietly, without making a scene. So Robert had been advised not to attend the First Community Church because of bad blood against the Love family. As you would guess, he did not heed the advice of his fathers, and after visiting one Sunday in May, he felt inspired to join the faithful in their evangelistic crusade to contact every home in the community. The church was growing and seemed to be very popular. Robert had failed to see the side glances or to hear the whispers directed toward him and his wife while their backs were turned. He refused to believe that people were so small, that for many generations the grandsons would continue to carry the war spears of their forefathers. Surely, the hatchet had been buried decades ago. After all, wasn't such forgiveness and goodwill required within the church?

A long year had passed with Robert pleading for his wife to try God again. With long lasting financial hardship, she had fallen away and grown bitter. Robert was surprised when one day she agreed to attend the community church with him. She quickly became close friends with the pastor's wife, Jill Albertson. Although Robert felt excluded from the friendship they were experiencing, and their relationship, he expected that Jill would be a positive influence upon his wife and persuasive for

saving their fragile marriage, even as it teetered on the brink of termination.

Robert was dead wrong. Jill had brought the accusation against him to his wife. There was a grab for power, then to use it to punish. Hateful revenge. But why? Was it simply women's scorn or was there a larger cause looming?

Eve filed for custody and claimed that Robert was a neglectful and abusive father. Suddenly Stephen disappeared. Another woman from the church when pressured reluctantly admitted to Robert that they were hiding him in a safe place. Jill Albertson, the pastor's wife, came to testify against Robert as he sought visitation with his son. Robert was accused of infidelity in his marriage and neglect toward his son.

The church preached against divorce. The marriage vow cannot be cancelled, and God is opposed to divorce, the pastor frequently warned. His wife convinced Eve to separate and told Robert that he was an adulterer. If he pursued another relationship in the future, even if there was a divorce decree in place, he would be committing adultery again.

Robert was a broken man, physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. Totally broken. He missed his son so much!

He asked God to show him the truth. From deep within, he knew something was grossly wrong. Was it possible that not all pastors, or

churches for that matter, truly represent God? The contradiction of their condemnation was obvious to Love who had pursued peace and reconciliation. Darkness versus light. Evil against goodness. They knew that Robert loved his son deeply, that in his weakened state he needed him. How could they attack the cherished relationship of father and son?

Love was weak and retreated, but God had not abandoned him. As a result of prayer, fasting, and reading the Bible, Robert was once again finding a sure footing, and gaining strength within. Answers. New resolve and purpose. Now he understood that he had to expose Jill to end her involvement in his personal life. He had to do it for his son's sake. They needed to be reunited and Stephen needed to be reaffirmed about his father. Robert was not a bad man.

He asked God for permission and the determination to confront the church that sheltered this wrongdoing. It claimed to be God's house, but in reality, it had become a fortress for their protection as they launching their personal attacks against others. It was their stronghold, yet open to the public. Visitors would not be prohibited from entering their fort. Robert had to attack them from within. It would be a surprise.

This is what the letter said:

“To Pastor Riff Albertson, Deacons of the First Community Church, and Members:

With my wife Eve, and son Stephen, I have visited your church many times recently. Although we are not members, we have enjoyed fellowshiping with you. As many of you already know, we as a family are going through a difficult time.

My wife, assisted by Mrs. Jill Albertson, the pastor’s wife, has separated and broken our home. My son was taken from me without my consent, or even knowing, and kept from me. I was not even given the courtesy of knowing his whereabouts, and needed to know that he was safe and well cared for. Members of your church and the pastor’s wife were involved in this action.

No one has come to me to question me or offer prayer or counsel. False accusations have been made against me and I have not been given the chance to answer them. I have been treated as one condemned.

To protect my rights and those of my son, I have initiated action with the court. The matter of visitation with my son should be decided by an unbiased and experienced Judge without the influence of one who is making false statements and speaking against me. That is the pastor’s wife, as she attended the hearing for visitation and

custody last week. I believe this action on her part is unfair to me as a father and completely inappropriate for one who is representing your church. What right does she have in doing so?

I suspect that many of you may not have been aware of the level of her involvement. I have requested a meeting with Pastor Riff and my wife for the opportunity to pursue reconciliation, but have been denied that chance. Pastor will not return my calls. It is my desire to save my family, and if that is not possible, I intend to fight with all I have to maintain, preserve, and expand my relationship with my son. Time with him is precious to me.

I am asking you, the leaders and members of First Community Church to now consider what is appropriate for the continued involvement of the church in my personal affairs. I ask for your prayers for forgiveness for us, and among us. But the increasing offense must end.

I will await your response in letter form. For now, the public's awareness of my concerns is limited to the exposure of this letter. However, if this detrimental action to me and my family continues, I will pursue legal action to have it halted. I will seek the assistance of others.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Robert Love”

The Reverend Riff Albertson resided in the small town of Henderson with his wife Jill and three teenage daughters in the church's parsonage. The large brick edifice that housed the foyer, sanctuary, and wings used for overflow or classrooms, was across the street, one-quarter of a mile due east, but easily within walking distance for the pastor's family who were frequently observed by nearly everyone in town walking along the cinder filled shoulder of the roadway, a constant and intended reminder to them that services were about to begin. The parsonage was an older and very modest house. The pastoral couple was in their late 30's.

Jill dressed, carried herself, and furnished her home to express an air of aristocracy. Like one competing with the most successful and financially enabled in the church, she could match their claim, or brag, to have acquired and possessed things of value, as if her self-worth was dependent on it. She always dominated the conversation. She was a tall and slender blonde and dressed modestly in tight clothing, except for her shoes, which were purposed for drawing attention, even the envy of other women. The high heels or thick wedges on her sandals were also intended to emphasize her long legs and lingering figure.

Riff was the manly type: tall, handsome, with a good physique. His thick and wavy hair, medium brown in color, and quick smile produced a confident appearance that was welcoming even to strangers. Somehow his demeanor had a way of drawing other people out. They desired and sought his advice and insights frequently. This empowered him. His words were always carefully chosen to be positive and encouraging. He had learned how to surf above the riff of discontent and discourse so frequently expressed by others. He would not be dirtied by it, and certainly would not be discredited by the stray words of his wife or children. How he handled them privately, behind closed doors, was unknown as the Albertsons kept their lips tightly sealed. Not a word.

But the obvious discontent expressed by the sometimes surly ways of the pastor's wife caused others who were more insightful and more experienced in life to reserve a question mark for the secrets of the parsonage and its occupants' home lives. The pastor's wife was required to be submissive and to acknowledge her husband's authority. Robert wondered why she had not been corrected for pandering in his affairs. Had she been disobedient?

Perhaps this explained Jill's need to quickly respond to the accusations rumored by other women as she came to their defense before caring to know the facts. They may have intended only gossip, but this

pastor's wife quickly desired to attack the accused with a religious authority that she brokered with confidence and skill and did so independently as if to establish her own importance. Sometimes the whole thing just blew up, out of proportion to the other woman's intentions, and she would quickly withdraw from Jill and church to protect her marriage.

Robert Love was not so lucky.

Her actions defined her cause. And her best kept secret was that her father had been an abusive alcoholic to whom she had never been able to reconcile the traumas she suffered as a little girl and young woman. Jill's father was deceased now, dying two years ago after a prolonged battle with cancer. She felt that he deserved such a painful demise, but still was not fulfilled in his suffering. From deep within the hidden compartments of her broken heart, she had a soul's desire that drove her for revenge. Something from her unsettled and troubled past had connected with Eve and led them directly to Robert, now the target of uncontrollable scorn.

As Robert pulled into the parking lot of the First Community Church, the spaces were quickly disappearing and the faithful were darting in front of cars, often with their children unattended. He had

purposely arrived only minutes before the start of the morning worship service. He wore a sport coat and 10 copies of the letter were tri-folded and placed in his inner jacket pocket. Robert walked briskly along the sidewalk that paralleled the front of the church past the old steeple bell that had been removed from the deteriorating tower and placed along the walkway in a display that featured a plaque recognizing the donations of those who contributed to its rescue and preservation. The sun was shining and it would be a warm spring day. Love didn't acknowledge those he encountered by chance, and shunned the usher at the front door. He didn't want to speak to anyone.

He darted through the foyer, past the table littered with tracts and brochures from missionaries supported by the church, and quickly grabbed the church bulletin from another usher, a single sheet of paper folded lengthwise with a colorful photo on the front featuring a cross surrounded by daffodils. He simply responded to the man's lackluster greeting with a nod.

It was now too late to change his mind. Robert was past the mark of no return in this trek into the den of legalism. He had to pause at the rear of the auditorium as he scanned it for a seat. He wanted to sit among strangers. The rear pew was already full with teenagers who reluctantly went to church to meet the obligation imposed by their parents. They

were allowed to sit in the rear with friends as long as they were quiet and did not distract the others present. There would be no giggling, or even conversation for that matter, once the service began. They would not be allowed to move from their seat. Latecomers who desired to join the pack were simply out of luck.

The heavy wooden doors used to close off the wing used for classrooms were open, allowing visitors to sit off to the side. This immediately appealed to Robert and he moved quickly there as he saw Pastor Riff Albertson step upon the stage. The church would be a packed house.

As the first song began with the pianist leading the way, the organist was slightly behind due to a faster tempo than she approved of, and Love relaxed slightly. He had entered their lair, and had not yet been accosted. In front, behind Pastor Riff sitting in a tall, wide oak chair that resembled a throne, was a large stained glass window depicting Jesus as a shepherd holding a lamb. The lamb represented innocence and purity. The contradiction wrenched at his gut as he felt the stares upon him, coming from the center seats. There was a low rumble. His presence was noticed.

The pastor's wife, Jill, sat in her usual seat, in the front pew against the center aisle. Robert was off to the far side, behind her, and he

doubted that she was aware of his coming. He was tempted to look throughout the congregation for his wife, Eve, but was timid in doing so.

The service proceeded as always, the order of it had not been changed in 50 years. Such an intrusion to tradition would not be tolerated here. Pastor Riff preached on a passage from Romans. Robert had not participated in the group reading of the Scripture.

Then the pastor noticed him. Robert had been closely watching his movements even as he analyzed his style but heard little that he said. Pastor Riff now directed his attention to Robert. Their eyes met. His were steely and unrelenting. *“He is trying to intimidate me,”* Robert thought to himself and looked away. When he returned his gaze, the pastor was still focused on him.

It was a torturous 65 minutes before the service concluded. The aisles quickly filled with those anxious for departure. Robert jumped into action. He handed his letter to Mr. Smith, a likely deacon. Next, as he sometimes pushed his way through the crowd, he reached Mr. Roberts, another long time member and most likely an elder. He gave him two copies, fearful of not reaching the others. But Robert managed to contact several more of his candidates before the crowd dispersed. He had caught their attention and they lingered to read his letter, and then began to

approach him, forming a circle that felt like a pack of wolves coordinated in their much exercised attack on their prey.

“Look at this,” he heard a man say as he passed the letter to another. His face tightly held the scowl. The next comment was directed at Robert. An impromptu meeting had formed. This is what Robert had hoped for.

“Neither we or the pastor’s wife are responsible for your troubles,” Smith blurted.

“My wife is only helping a needy person,” the pastor said in his defense more than her’s. “She is helping the person you are hurting!”

Robert quickly replied, “Now you know that there is much more to it than that.” He felt a flash of heat as his face turned red and his pulse quickened.

“You cheated on your wife,” the deacon accused. “It is common knowledge among us.”

“Not true.” Robert spoke with confidence and authority. He appeared to be unsettled by the accusation he expected.

“I don’t want to be part of this,” Adams complained.

The men began to shuffle around. “Sorry, I don’t have time now. My dinner is in the oven,” another retorted. Then just as quickly as the unofficial meeting began, it adjourned, without conclusion or an answer

for Love. They quickly exited the building. The dinner bell, something of greater importance to them, had been sounded.

Robert paused and watched to see if anyone would approach him with the desire to discuss his letter, to ask a question, or perhaps to be sympathetic. No one came and as he looked around he realized that the pastor had also urgently and quickly disappeared.

He felt a little shame as he approached the door that led outside. The encounter had not been personally gratifying, yet Robert felt confident that it had been necessary. A few others lingered in the parking lot, but no one acknowledged him. Robert was relieved that his wife had not been present to stir things up and he was content to have avoided a shouting match.

His escape was completed.

Love never received a formal reply, not a letter or even a message delivered by voicemail or the third person informer. But it was obvious that they had discussed and considered his complaint. Noticeable was the absence of one pastor's wife from future hearings and encounters with his wife and son.

Mission accomplished, thank God.

14. Revelation – the Truth about Adultery

The purpose of religion is for the person engaged in it to find understanding. Hopefully this will lead to an inner peace. This is the spiritual journey of the reverent. Most often this is pursued by reading the teachings of others. In Christianity, the Holy Spirit is believed to offer guidance, even lead the follower of Christ into knowledge.

If the disciple says “God told me,” he may be considered in our society to be mentally unbalanced. Yet the question begs asking: how does the Supreme Being influence the message of the inspired writer? How does He communicate with him?

Love sought such wisdom. He determined that to perceive God’s instruction, he first must quiet other voices, even the clatter and noise in his life. He began a personal fast of TV, radio, secular music, and all reading except for the Holy Scriptures. Like the pursuit of a monk in a monastery, he seldom engaged in conversation with others. His quest

was singular, even secretive. God occupied his mind. People were a distraction.

Robert Love did not expect to hear an audible voice, but as thoughts, mostly ideas, came, he wondered if they had originated with the Father of Light and Love. Robert prayed not for specific instruction, but for understanding. As his confidence in the guidance of the Holy Spirit increased, he tested new thoughts with what he confidently understood with clarity to be the authoritative teaching of the Bible. God spoke a sonata of love. The accusation of condemnation pronounced against Love was being commuted. Continued study of God's Word, the Holy Bible, confirmed Love's insights.

It was no man's advice he sought, regardless of his stature, but God's: holy truth. What he learned changed him, reshaped the understanding of his present dilemma, and redirected him into new hope. Key in his quest for truth was the lessons he learned about adultery. Jesus had not condemned the guilty woman, but had forgiven her. Understanding this issue freed him from his personal prison of guilt. Here are the lessons Love learned, penned by his own hand.

Lesson 1: a new narrative of a Biblical account

The person who is astute will learn that the account of the woman caught in adultery was added to the first compilation of writings that were intended to become the Bible. So important were the insights gleaned from this report, that they came to define a new faith for Robert Love. In meditating on the Biblical account, he eventually wrote these words. This is his attempt to add a contemporary perspective to the tale of the ages.

Although common sense tells her that she should avoid him, their eyes soon meet in an intimate hold. Her heart is throbbing and her mind begins to spin. "What is it about this man," she asks herself.

His eyes are full of desire and passion. They speak the unspeakable words of love. It is as if he has already touched her heart. She feels the power of reason waning.

Her eyes express reluctance. She has been used and hurt many times before. But the love in his face is so intense that she cannot refuse it.

Without words, the power of his gaze holds her. She feels her fear melting away. This desire is more than she can resist.

In their gaze there is intimate communication. It is the talk of love. She feels herself losing control of her self-made defenses. This love is something she desires deep down inside, and longs to share with another.

It is the beginning of an affair that will change the course of her life.

Although these words may sound like a scene from a romance novel, they describe a meeting of two people in the Bible that will redefine the meaning of love and forgiveness for all time. Understanding what happened between them will expose the truth about True Love, misrepresented by false religion.

All she really wanted was love, but the hardship of her life took her on a course of abusive relationships. Once there was a time when she desired to give herself as an expression of the deeper feelings she felt for a special friend. He was different, or at least that is what she thought at the time. She wanted to really trust and love him, but in the end he rejected her. She felt deeply hurt and used.

Now she uses her sex appeal to get things for herself. She has many material and financial needs. Inside she struggles with feelings of inadequacy, unable to find a partner who will commit. She truly cares for her children and rationalizes that they will benefit from her present course of action. She is an adulteress.

The loneliness she feels is almost overwhelming. In the pleasurable escape of wine and sex she has learned to hide her pain. She has found temporary relief, but not release. Her emptiness and longing have become a force that drives her farther and farther along the pathways of infidelity. She is exploring its many methods of deceit.

She desires now to forgive herself, but there seems to be no way to escape. She has abandoned her faith in God. The religious righteous publically despise and condemn her, but secretly desire her physical skill. Some have tasted of the forbidden fruit in the secret place.

The risk of losing her present lover, a married man, has now presented a challenge for her. It is a relational struggle that she must win for herself. She has given him what he wants and he knows there is a price to pay for it. She threatens to expose him, a public disgrace he cannot risk.

It is a dangerous game. She shuns those who oppose her. "Who are they to condemn me," she assures herself. "Maybe, just maybe," she reasons, "he will stay with me and we can somehow make it work."

Or, she will make him stay.

She feels a hopelessness of being the victim of her own devices. She regards her self-reliance as her primary goal, because no one else cares for, or about her. She doesn't care about them either. She has learned to be a survivor. It is a hard and cruel world in which she struggles to maintain her meager existence.

...then she saw him, the man who touched her heart with a single gaze.

Suddenly she knew she would have to make a choice. Would she abandon her former 'love' for this new one?

The vices of adultery quickly influence her reasoning. Can she have both? Should she trust this new man? The way she knows is one of manipulation and control. "I can trust no one," she reminds herself.

But the passion of this love demands something more, a commitment. All she has ever known tells her not to trust him. She feels the hold of her painful past experiences. Remorse fills her soul. Can there be any

release from her dungeon of hopelessness and despair? Can she believe in, can she trust, the persuasion of His love?

The reality of true love was communicated to a lonely and scared young woman by the eyes of Jesus.

...Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up (looked deeply into her eyes*) and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

"No one sir," she said.

"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin." (*Words in parenthesis added.) John 8:9-11

Love perceived that the woman caught in adultery and brought before Jesus in the account of John found release from her personal prisons, freedom for a new life in relationship with her Savior and Lord. She represents millions of others who have since been entangled in the deceit of adultery, condemned by religious authority, or falsely accused of an affair. But the question persisted in his mind. Why had Jesus not followed the law of his day and condoned her punishment?

Lesson 2: the male adulterer

(From Robert's study journal after intensive Bible study and research, he wrote this narrative to share with others.)

"she is more righteous than I..." Ge. 38:36

Many of the issues and implications of pre-Jewish law are addressed in the story of Judah and Tamar in Genesis, chapter thirty-eight. Judah was the fourth son of Jacob, by his first wife Leah.

According to the account, Judah married a Canaanite woman. They had three sons named Er, Onan and Shelah.

Er, the eldest son, married a girl named Tamar. It seems that this is when the trouble for the family began.

Er died, so Judah provided his next son, Onan, to **"fulfill your duty to her as a brother-in-law to produce offspring for your brother."** This is an interesting law. It did provide for the plight of the widow. A single woman had no right to property or possessions in their society. She had no way to sustain herself financially. The Jews had religious laws designed to provide for the needs of widows and orphans.

Onan went to Tamar but acted to prevent a pregnancy. He also died.

Judah then told Tamar, his daughter-in-law, to live as a widow in her father's house until his youngest son, Shelah, became of age. Actually, Judah was afraid of also losing Shelah, his only surviving son, to the terrible situation.

After a long time, Judah's wife also died. He went on a journey to a nearby town to tend to his herd of sheep. Tamar, realizing that she was not going to be given the youngest son, took off her veil and posed along the road as a prostitute.

As the story goes, Judah, upon seeing her and not recognizing her as his daughter-in-law, decides to hire her. What will he pay? He offers to send her a young goat. She asks for a pledge to guarantee payment. She wants something that will clearly identify her partner, his seal and its cord, and his staff. They sleep together and she becomes pregnant, finally.

Judah follows through on his agreement and sends a servant with the goat to pay the prostitute and retrieve his seal. But the woman believed to be a shrine prostitute is nowhere to be found, and the locals report that no prostitute works the area.

This whole affair seems very outlandish, but it should be understood that prostitution was an acceptable part of the Canaanite religion, however, Judah, a Jew, should not have participated in the pagan ritual. The Canaanites believed that it pleased the god of fertility which would in turn

provide a healthy crop and bountiful harvest. This false religion worshipped Baal and participated in the evil atrocity of child sacrifice.

The Jews were strangers to the land and felt inadequate in dealing with the difficult problems of farming there. The Canaanites were experienced and more successful. For the Jews, this became their rationalization, fueled by sexual desire, to engage in the foreign religion and its immoral activities. Surely this was an act of spiritual adultery. The resulting spiritual chaos eventually brought about the judgment of God.

Getting back to the story, it was three months later that Judah was informed of Tamar's pregnancy. She was said to be guilty of not maintaining the fidelity required of a widow. Judah ordered her to be executed, death by fire! He did so as a Jewish leader, with the full authority of his religion, a religion he had personally corrupted by his perfidious behaviors and immorality. Still he moved with abusive power knowing its corruption, with the full endorsement of his religious peers.

Well, you can guess what happened next. Tamar blew the whistle and produced her evidence of the birthing father. The man who had sentenced her to a torturous death was proven to be her sexual partner and the natural father of her child.

Judah's response was, "**She is more righteous than I.**" It is assumed, because the scripture does not state it, that Judah then took Tamar as his wife.

There are three important points that need to be learned from this story. First, Judah was a man who usurped his authority for personal gain. He secretly prostituted himself, yet imposed the death penalty when an unmarried woman in his family became pregnant. The problem is not with God's law, but with the abuse of it. The agent of authority did not act with integrity or justice, but instead acted in contradiction of the law for personal gain, assuming that there would be no accountability of the abuse. Of course, this is confidence in a lie of selfishness and blinding arrogance. Throughout history societies and nations have been corrupted by people in the position of power and authority who have abused their place of responsibility. This was so in the case of Judah.

God has always required a heart of true devotion. Purity was established by a law that opposed inter-cultural marriages in the times of the Patriarchs. In Genesis, chapter twenty-four, Abraham commissioned his servant to get a wife for his son Isaac from his own relatives, and not from the Canaanites among who they were living at the time. In chapter twenty-eight, Isaac blesses his son Jacob and commands him to not take a wife from among the Canaanites. But Jacob's son Judah broke the rule and married the daughter of a Canaanite man named Shua. Judah's course of life in straying away from God in disobedience to His law is evident here.

Secondly, understanding the outcome of the story of Judah and Tamar, teaches that God's forgiveness is His priority, the supreme rule, and

complete. In true forgiveness the offense is completely forgotten. Could the Messiah have been the descendant of those conceived in prostitution and adultery, if God did not cancel the wrongdoing?

Judah had one surviving son from his first marriage, Shelah. Twin sons, Perez and Zerah, came as the result of the affair with Tamar, alias the temple prostitute. Jesus came from the lineage of King David, who was a descendant of Perez. The line of descendants was: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, Perez, Hezron, Ram, Amminadab, Nahshon, Salmon, Boaz, Obed, Jesse, and David (1Chronicles 2). Of course the ancestral line to the Lord continued to Solomon, the child conceived by David in an adulterous affair with Bathsheba.

and, thirdly, the moral of the story...

What Jesus Wrote In the Sand

Surely the story of Judah and Tamar taught a lesson of false self-righteousness to those who studied the Torah, even those of Jesus' day. To see the third point, we must advance through time to an event which paralleled the story of Judah and Tamar. Now see Jesus with a crowd of people before him. The Pharisees are trying to trap him in a contradiction of law. Before him stands a Jewish girl caught in adultery. Yes, this is the story of John, chapter eight, and included previously in my journal. What did Jesus write in the sand? How could he write something so simple and so quickly that it would speak so poignantly to convict the religious

accusers? People have wondered for nearly two thousand years what Jesus wrote then. Now, I have a theory.

The teachers of religion in Jerusalem were very apt with the Scriptures. It was common for the religious zealous to memorize it. How was it referenced then? It's possible that each verse was numbered, in a way similar to the way the Bible is referenced today.

I believe that Jesus wrote in the sand the reference for what today is Genesis, chapter thirty-eight, verse twenty-six.

Judah ... said, "She is more righteous than I, ...

Judah's statement was one of true confession. The truth of this message was one that pierced the hearts of the Pharisees who now stood in Judah's place, many years later, in an event that reenacted the happenings of their ancestor.

And now, each of us, stand in their place as we are confronted by our own sin. Who has the right to judge and condemn the other person?

And Love pondered his own plight. *“How can they condemn me for a false accusation? They are truly self-righteous, as the Pharisees were, and are missing the entire point of the forgiveness offered by Jesus.*

“Ultimately, they acted to empower and elevate themselves by attacking me, and did this with a false religious authority, just as Judah and the Pharisees. I will not be judged by them. They are legalistic, the hypocrites of today!!

“God doesn’t condemn me, he offers forgiveness and healing!”

Love meditated on the mercy of God and began to feel convicted of his own judging and his desire to retaliate against his accusers, even as he condemned them. Secretly he also desired revenge and knowing that he was innocent he felt justified for it. But could he receive God’s forgiveness if he punished? He continued to write in his journal after reflecting on the question some more.

It is so vitally important that we direct our attention to ourselves, away from the other person. You see, it is more than a matter of judging, it is one of condemnation.

Here is the principle: it is not difficult to judge sin, but when you condemn the sinner, you have implicated yourself. Judging the wrong is not the problem; it is condemning the person. Even if we have not committed the same offense, we may be guilty of it in spiritual significance. Our

expression of condemnation has the potential of being equally as evil.

Could this be spiritual adultery - to deny God's mercy?

“So... I will ask for the power to forgive them, and let it pass,”

Love concluded as he made his decision. *“The pain they have caused I will give to God and ask for His healing.”*

([spiritual adultery](#): Jam 4:4, 1Jo 2:15-16, 1Jo 1:5-7, Col 3:5.

[Share with a friend.](#))

A Personal Appeal

Next, Love began to feel the pain of others caught in the snare of adultery. He was troubled in knowing about a friend, a young paralegal, his distant cousin, who was having a sexual affair with a handsome young attorney in the office where she worked. He was a married man with a family. In concern for his friend, he penned the following words as a letter to her:

"Dear Terrie:

"I wish that I could speak to you from a heart of His true love. I'll try, will you listen?"

"I know your fear. I feel your need and your pain. I know that you are afraid to end your affair because of the risk of losing your man. But there can be no true love in your present relationship with him. I know that you need to believe the lie, but your only hope is to choose the truth."

"Will you force him to love you? Can you? I know that you cannot accept rejection, but can you make him fulfill his promise of love? Is he able to? What does he really owe you and how can you really collect on that debt?"

"This man has a wife and he may be able to deny the attachment of their many years of struggle and commitment in marriage, but he cannot and will not ever be able to reject his children. Can you see the impossible position that you are putting him in? If he has true love for his family and is forced to deny it, he can only continue on to serve a false love and false commitment. This is all that you can ever hope to receive from him. Adultery and love cannot mix. His heart is being wrenched in two. His capacity to love is being destroyed."

"Release him. There is no chance, no hope, of knowing real love with him the way it is now. Will you see the truth?"

"End the affair, stop the adultery.

"Give real love the freedom to fly. If it is meant for you it will return, but you cannot control it.

"The love you need and want is found in the eyes of Jesus. He is the way of love and the truth of love. In Him you will find and feel the life of love.

"I wish I could persuade you to accept the truth. The choice you must now make is hard. Adultery has a tight grip, but now you do have the power to choose freedom from its control. True love will heal all your hurts. It will satisfy all your needs. You don't need the affair. Can you believe that?

"Trust in Jesus and the message of healing love that He is speaking to your heart right now. I have done so. I will help you when your faith is weak. Will you let me?"

"Sincerely, in love: A true friend."

Robert later heard that Terrie had broken off the affair.

(Available at Updyke Books.com is a booklet that further expounds the subject, entitled, “Adultery – the Lesser Life,” it is available in a free download. Click [HERE](#).)

PART THREE: Reaffirmed

The cherished journal, (it had been a time when Robert heard the Lord speaking most clearly to him), the lessons learned, the letter that ended an affair... all this brought affirmation and great assurance to Robert Love. It was a long five years before his divorce was finalized. Finally, Robert had the freedom to begin a new life. This was his time. He felt ready to move on.

Robert enrolled in seminary to explore what he believed to be the calling on his life, to serve others as a minister of the Gospel. As one truly forgiven, he desired to share this message with others accused, even those guilty of sin that left them condemned by the religious righteous. Love had experienced the tortures of the legalistic self-righteous: those who were guilty of their own selfish, sometimes hateful sins, but chose to hide their faults from the unsuspecting targets of their contempt, often their religious peers. Their evil acts seemed to continue unabated.

Eve had won custody of Stephen and Robert was only allowed to visit with his son every other weekend. It was a hardship they endured

but eventually adjusted to. Robert had become accustomed to living alone. He had no desire to pursue another relationship.

Seven more years passed as Robert worked for his graduate degrees. St. James was Robert's first parish and he accepted the assignment after his son graduated from high school and left for college. Love served there three years before the accusation of sexual assault. It surprised Robert, as a knife thrust in the back of an unsuspecting victim. He is fifty-three years old now, experienced in life, but still shaken to the core.

But all was not for naught. During those first years at St James he had seen God move in the lives of others. This confirmed his calling, and the confidence he placed in the plan he saw as ordained. These events, the testimony of others changed by the message of mercy, now stand as evidence that God had been orchestrating a plan for Robert's life. How could he doubt Him now?

15. A Grieving Father – The Ultimate

Healing

He dreaded the question that had no proper or sufficient answer. It most frequently came during the second stage of loss and grief. It is spoken with anger. During this time, many sought out Pastor Robert Love. Some cried uncontrollably in his office. Others raged at him and God. Love always felt completely inadequate, like an athlete facing a competitor he is unqualified to wrestle: he is the state champion and I have a losing record in my district. Still, it was part of the job – all he could do was quickly, silently, pray for wisdom. He knew God cared, but despite his training and experience, his spirit usually sank to an unrecoverable depth, perhaps intending to remain hidden there, at the hearing of a singular word. Why?

Pastor Love spent most of his free time in his office. It seemed to shelter him and because of its familiarity, it felt like a safe place. His

modest cubical was located in the front of the church, to the right side of the hallway that led to the sanctuary.

There Love was secluded behind three closed doors, two with silent alarms that alerted him of expected visitors, or unexpected intruders. Regardless, when he was present the pastor left the front door of the church unlocked – it has the first alarm sensor. Immediately inside is the sign that protrudes from the wall at eye level, indicating the location of his office.

The door at the hallway has the second alarm. It opens into a small windowless room that was first intended to occupy the church receptionist, and later the secretary. Neither exists now, as the church is staffed entirely by volunteers. The top of the desk here is vacant. Two tall file cabinets on the left wall are half empty. There is no need for them these days, with unlimited storage available on the computer. Although the light is always on, the room presents a feeling of abandonment, like that of a mansion turned into a museum. Behind and to the right of the desk is the door that leads to the pastor's office. It is solid wood and paneled.

Love always greets visitors in the front room and if they are a male parishioner, he might escort them into his private space to a more comfortable chair. During such a meeting, the two office doors always

remain open and conversations are held in low tones. If the surprise visitor is a woman, the pastor will ask her to return at an appointed time when another counselor will be present.

His desk is old, made of heavy metal, possibly a government surplus item. The wainscoting is a dark wood with a heavy varnish of high gloss, now clouded, scuffed and scratched. The wood is probably mahogany. Above it the plaster has deep cracks and sections of it protrude outward, seemingly ready to fall to the floor. It is painted a light and dingy mauve color. Behind the desk there are two small stained glass windows with geometric designs. The blues and lavenders project subdued light and promote a solemn mood. Despite the healing affects claimed by the oils made of the lavender plant, this minister is required to apply a more difficult treatment – one of understanding when needed to soothe the soul in anguish.

A loud noise jarred his body as Love was startled and awakened by the telephone. He had set the volume on low and still disliked the intrusive ring that rattled his nerves. He had been reading the Scripture on his computer monitor and meditating on a verse in Isaiah when he drifted off.

“St. James. Pastor Love speaking,” he answered softly.

“Hello Pastor. How are you today?”

He recognized her voice. “Fine. And how might you be today, Mrs. Shermanski?” She was a new volunteer, recruited at the membership meeting held last month. Her position was that of care coordinator.

She went directly to the purpose of her call, skipping small talk. “Pastor, have you heard about the Wilsons?”

“Um...” he paused. “Do you mean Jeffrey and Diane? I haven’t seen them in a while.”

“They lost their baby,” Mrs. Shermanski interrupted. “The baby was born prematurely and died suddenly last night.”

Acquainted with bad news, his voice became quieter, a mechanical response to what he heard. “That’s too bad. A nice couple. In their thirties, I believe?”

“They have three other children.”

He was trying to remember. Yes, both tall and nice looking – a prestigious appearing couple, and nice family. “*Oh yes, three little girls*” he told himself. He guessed their ages to be one, three, and five, all pre-schoolers.

“They want to bury their baby from the church. Will you call them?”

“Yes Mrs. Shermanski, and please pray.”

“Thank you, pastor. God bless..” and the phone went dead before he could say goodbye.

Three days later Pastor Love greeted the grieving parents and grandparents on the landing in front of the church. The funeral director had already placed the disturbingly small casket at the front of the church on a cart that was raised and then partially covered with a purple velvet blanket. Bouquets of orchids were placed on each end of the temporary table.

Love recalled the Wilsons. But this time the young mother appeared to be very fragile and despite her recent child bearing, the pastor suspected that something more was wrong. Her embrace was soft and he responded in the same, their forearms only slightly touching the back of each other. Pastor Love met Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Wilson, paternal grandparents, and Mrs. Barbara Lucas, the only surviving grandparent from the mother’s side.

In rehearsed fashion the pastor escorted them to the second pew, facing the closed casket, and extended his hand in instruction. Words were few – an atmosphere of remorse was heavy upon them.

“Shall we begin?” he asked softly. Eyes that were red, swollen, and moist looked toward him and he noticed her nod slightly. Pastor

Love moved to the front pew across the aisle and sat down to pray, silently.

Despite his desire to offer personal and heartfelt words of condolence, his vocal cords failed when he tried to speak, and he choked on his saliva as he attempted to begin the liturgy. His mind was blank. His heart was void. Pastor Love quickly opened his prayer book and felt for a familiar page that had the top corner folded down, forming a small triangle as a marker.

The next 10 minutes felt like 60. You could have heard a pin drop. In the middle of his reading Love glanced to the parents and grandparents and felt overwhelmed with sadness. He lost his composure, and dropped the booklet. Embarrassed, he quickly reached for it and bending over his eyes came level with the small burial box. It was ivory in color. An angel was engraved in gold on the front. Also on the front, center, were the initials of the deceased. M.J.W., Matthew Jason Wilson. He had had only a few days.

Standing again, Love looked for his place as he fumbled with the pages. He began to cry softly. Escaping were emotions that had been bottled up for many months. Love was embarrassed, sorry for his failure to exhibit a calming confidence in the midst of this couple's loss, and felt completely inadequate.

A long moment of silence passed, now echoed by the sobs of the mother and maternal grandmother.

Love quickly apologized and resumed the reading with new determination and vigor. It was almost over. He had to persist and finish this service.

The funeral director stood in the rear of the sanctuary, signaling support for the frail clergyman and offering relief as required.

Pastor Love stood in silence as he watched the procession that followed, the deceased leading the way. He was unable to express the condolence he felt was required. As the front door opened, a gust of wind rushing inside. From the realms beyond, it was as a reunion of spirits, taking flight on paths unknown to a place they called heaven.

Still upset about his failure to perform his pastoral duty sufficiently, Love was even more disturbed to hear additional news about the Wilson family. Not previously knowing their tragic circumstances he had not addressed their needs adequately during the funeral service of their baby. Now Love understood that so much more should have been said and was needed by them at the time.

Diane Wilson was 27 weeks pregnant when she received a devastating diagnosis of an aggressive disease. The ravaging melanoma

had spread like wildfire through the cells of her body. An aggressive chemotherapy treatment would have threatened the life of the child she carried, her fourth baby and her first boy. The couple was jubilant at the news of a son. The mother would do nothing to harm him, her coming joy. She literally sacrificed her life for his, the promise of new life and hope. It was truly an act of selfless love.

Five years ago doctors had removed a melanoma from her left, rear shoulder. Now it had returned with a deadly fury that could not be explained.

Matthew was taken surgically at the earliest possible time. But questions now lingered among the nurses, wondering if the doctors had miscalculated his age and the time required in the womb for the best chance at survival outside. He was 1 pound, 12 ounces at birth. The doctors said that it was an infection that killed him three days later.

Now, the mother would also die. The frail woman that Pastor Love met, and then failed to console, had today entered the hospice wing at the hospital.

The loss was incomprehensible. Like the flickering flame on a white pillar candle, placed in a base of crystal edged in gold, it flounders due to the increasing movement of air upon it that is unexplained, a draft that attempts to extinguish the fragile light.

Love sighed from deep within his soul, hoping to expel the grieving that quickly consumed him at his awareness of the father's impending loss. Oh the pain. The injustice. The terrible loss – a son, and now his wife, the mother of his three young daughters, and all within a short period of time.

“Oh God, why?” Love prayed in remorse. It was the question he was so often required to answer, but now, all he could do was cry before his Heavenly Father and pass the unanswerable question to the One with greater knowledge. No reply. Nothing – only a void of emptiness and darkness. Like a monstrous storm, when the dark clouds billow and the wind howls outside, an eerie remorse burst within his soul. Love was consumed and his body shook as his sobs began.

Another day dawned, and it appeared that the living must continue. Pastor Love skipped his usual routine of pampering himself to look good for the position he held, and skipping breakfast and his morning devotions, Bible reading and prayer, he grabbed for a Keurig and made a quick cup of coffee. All he wanted to do was to hide in his office. He would leave the phone off the hook. This day, Pastor Love needed to hear from God, and that he would.

He was settling in for what he hoped would be an uneventful day when at 11:15 am he heard the buzzer triggered by the front door. Pastor Love was not expecting any visitors. He waited the usual 40 seconds it took a person to enter and heard the second buzzer. The intruder, whoever it might be, was now standing behind the door Love was staring at. His unwanted guest was in the adjoining office.

Reluctantly, the pastor pushed his chair back from his desk and walked toward the door. He suddenly wished it was secured, to offer protection from an unwanted guest. He reminded himself that he should install remotely controlled locks and a peephole.

Forcing his hand to move, he reached for the door knob and cleared the barrier that stood between him and the unknown. The man he saw before him was facing in the opposite direction, apparently considering an exit.

“Can I help you?” the pastor offered reluctantly.

When he turned, Love quickly recognized him, although he was unshaven, his clothes were wrinkled and he generally had a disheveled appearance.

“Mr. Wilson... I wasn't expecting you.” Another pause and, “I'm so sorry.”

Jeffrey Wilson stepped forward and offered his hand in a welcoming gesture. As the men clasped their hands, Robert Love noticed his grip, firm and sincere.

Then he reached for a hug, and Love allowed it. The embrace was quick with a firm pat and suddenly the two men were looking at each other again.

“Please, come into my office,” Love offered with rising concern to the man who had not yet spoken.

Wilson settled into a leather chair with wooden arms. The pastor sat next to him in another that matched it.

“I heard that your wife is ill... I’m so sorry, ...really,” Love attempted in explanation. “I didn’t know. I should have done more.”

Wilson was focused on a dirty spot on the soiled carpet, but then lifted his head. “I came to thank you.”

Love waited, anxious and surprised.

“We were moved by your compassion at our son’s service. It meant a lot to us.”

“Thank you,” Love replied reluctantly. He searched for words, something to say that if not meaningful would at least be appropriate. “Sometimes it is still hard for me. I really do feel for your loss. I would have thought...” he tried to regain his composure and speak only after

weighing his words carefully. He wanted to avoid the thought but continued, “that God would have spared your son.” And the pastor became angry with himself for vocalizing the improper sentiment, and then stunned at implying the unthinkable question. *Why?*

No one spoke for the next few minutes and Love prepared his defense.

“I can see that you are shaken,” Wilson finally offered. “But it’s OK... It’s all OK. She is going home. This is her final healing... She says that it is her time.”

Love was taken aback by the proclamation of faith which he had failed to speak in encouragement, but now heard from the one who was suffering such great loss. Finally, he became astute enough to hold his tongue.

His mind raced with broken thoughts. “*Suffering ended. New life in death. Home in heaven. A glorified body.*” But why had his training failed him? This pastor should have been the person to offer such spiritual insight and hope in faith.

“This song has helped me understand,” Wilson continued. “Please, as a token of my appreciation, I want you to have it.”

He handed Love a CD. Written by hand on it were the words, “Home Free – Wayne Watson.”

“Thank you,” the pastor blurted.

Wilson quickly rose to his feet, tears filling his eyes. “Pastor, will you please keep us in your prayers?”

“Yes, of course,” finally he said something of some merit. The pastor considered offering a prayer at that moment but hesitated.

Wilson quickly nodded and darted for the door. Love blinked, and his visitor was gone.

He placed the CD onto his computer drive and pushed it in. A song began to play. Love paused the recording to reflect on its message. He replayed it and grabbed for a piece of paper to write down these words:

“I’m trying hard not to think you unkind
 But Heavenly Father
 If you know my heart
 Surely you can read my mind
 Good people underneath the sea of grief
 Some get up and walk away
 Some will find ultimate relief”

“Home Free, eventually
 At the ultimate healing we will be Home Free
 Home Free, oh I’ve got a feeling
 At the ultimate healing
 We will be Home Free”

"Out in the corridors we pray for life
 A mother for her baby, A husband for his wife
 Sometimes the good die young
 It's sad but true
 And while we pray for one more heartbeat
 The real comfort is with you"

...

"Home Free, eventually
 At the ultimate healing gonna be Home Free
 Home Free, oh its more than a feeling
 At the ultimate healing
 Gonna be Home Free"

written and song by Wayne Watson

and published by Warner/Chappell Music, Inc

It seems strange to man, but it is part of God's plan, His
 intention. The person who ministers is the one who is ministered to, and
 often he receives the greater blessing.

*"Forgive me Lord, for my recent time of doubting," Love prayed
 silently. "You have shown me, by your provision, despite my
 inadequacies, how much you love this man."*

*"I want to be a better pastor. Am I worthy of serving you? Teach
 me. Help me to better understand your mercy and love."*

“In Jesus name I pray, Amen.”

And Love was once again reconciled to the Lord.

16. A Prostitute Saved – A Mysterious

Visitor

It first comes as an unexpected thought, but then persists. Some may call it an inclination. If the thought is directing you to do something good, then perhaps you should listen. It may be God.

The three high-backed chairs on the platform appeared as thrones, but they remained empty at the pastor's request. Love disliked the aristocracy they expressed. He felt disdain toward the reference, "Most Reverend," or "Holiness," and never represented himself that way. He saw his calling in humility as a servant and believed that without God's help he would fail utterly. Still as a man of the cloth, he did not immediately object to such references of respect made toward him by strangers. But to those he knew, he asked to be called Pastor Rob, and those closer, family and friends, called him "Robby."

During the Sunday worship at St. James, Pastor Rob sat in the front pew, to the right of the pulpit, until his presence was required on the platform. Others from the congregation spoke the welcome, led in the singing of songs from the hymnal, and made announcements. The pastor's role was to ask the attendees to read the Scripture in unison, pray, and then deliver his weekly sermon.

At full capacity this stately cathedral seated 320 souls. The church building was 165 years old. It had been constructed during the time when the Christian Church was wealthy and used expensive, over-size materials and quality workmanship to raise new cathedrals as a testimony of the power and presence of God's Kingdom, designed to inspire awe from the devoted and to intimidate those who rejected their faith. The exterior walls were solid granite, the floors marble, and the arched roof trusses were made of solid mahogany. There were six polished granite pillars on each side of the building upon which the massive wood trusses were perched to reach upward. The pillars accommodated the placement of five tall and narrow stained glass windows on each side, between them. The colored glass formed geometric designs but seldom were illuminated by bright light as the buildings alongside mostly blocked it. The front and rear were decorated with wood panels, also mahogany. The altar was separated from the

sanctuary by railings which formed a complete visual as well as physical barrier. Behind it were three large paintings that depicted the life of Jesus: his birth, the Sermon on the Mount, and his crucifixion.

“Today’s reading is from the Book of Titus, chapter two, versus eleven through and including verse fourteen.”

Pastor Rob paused to give the congregants a chance to open the pew Bible or find the bulletin insert.

Together they read in monotone:

“(11) For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, (12) training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, (13) waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, (14) who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.”

“It is only one sentence,” Love thought to himself.

“Thank you. Please join with me in prayer... We thank Thee, Father, for all Thy many and gracious bounties. Teach us to avoid

the pitfalls of prejudice, pride, and vanity. Bring us your salvation, even victory over sin. Train us for Thy service. Prepare us for Thy coming. Grant to us your Holy Spirit.”

“Make us thoughtful of the weak, the sick, the needy, and the unfortunate, and make our humble lives a reflection of Thy goodness. We ask these things in Thy name. Amen.”

The usual order of service was then interrupted by a previous request from Mrs. Sherman. She had assembled a small group of young adult women who had been meeting on Wednesday evenings to sing a cappella. This was their performance debut and as papers and clothes rustled, a small degree of excitement moved throughout the gathering. Pastor Rob quickly exited the platform and watched with interest as the girls came forward and formed two short rows on the auditorium floor in front of the pews, each with eight singers, including Mrs. Sherman in the back row.

Of particular interest to the pastor was a young woman who stood in front, off to the right. She was wearing a scarf, red and pink in color with a checker board design that alternated the colors, and a thick golden thread was woven in and out, along each row of large

blocks. He had heard that her name was Thrisa, but had not yet met her.

Like many at St. James, residents of Stanton, a declining city of 98,000 at the last census, Thrisa had a shaded past. In recent years drugs had invaded the urban areas of north central Pennsylvania. The city had experienced its heyday 150 years earlier with the rise of local industry that busied the railroad with cargo and passengers. Much of it was fueled by the national demand for anthracite coal. The deep coal mines were located further north in Scranton, where the most prosperous communities formed, decorated by small mansions that housed the entrepreneurs of that age. The area surrounding Stanton never had more than strip mines that quickly failed to yield a concentrated form of the hardened black rock. Many of the row houses in Stanton had been quickly and poorly constructed to provide housing for the surge of workers that came seeking steady employment in the booming local job market which just as quickly shrunk back during the next thirty years. Now the homes were decrepit. Unemployment and crime had become the way of life for those who persisted to stay in Stanton. It survived with a small business center, an arena, and a motel and shopping center that

flourished along Interstate 81. Exit 126 caught travelers from Harrisburg, Baltimore, and even DC, south, who were headed north possibly to Binghamton, Syracuse or even Albany. It was 67 miles to the next exit for the driver going north.

Thrisa had been caught up in the culture of drugs and prostitution. Local thugs were expanding their cocaine and heroin trafficking trade with an escort service that was now offered at several local hotels. Illicit drugs and sex was a combo that was especially profitable for the provider.

Thrisa was born and raised here. Pastor Rob had been encouraged to see her in attendance for the past four weeks. He had heard rumors that she was going straight.

The ensemble received an enthusiastic round of applause.

Returning to the pulpit, Pastor Rob looked out upon 45 people – not a bad number for such a gathering during the first week of March. Temperatures outside had been above freezing for nearly a week and spring was in the air.

“Did you notice that our Scripture is a single sentence?” he asked. He expected to hear a chuckle, but their faces were blank and void of an emotional expression, like the tomb stones of the

cemetery that reminded him of those who previously had their chance to experience life, even the abundant life that the Creator intended. Love wondered if he could reach the physically alive who seemed to be mostly dead, spiritually.

“The word in this passage that catches my attention is ‘zealous.’ It suggests that we should be a people who are energetic, enthusiastic, and even passionate.” The pastor paused for effect and looked upon the faces once again for a response.

“I am asking myself why we are not passionate for the life and service the Lord has given to us. It seems to me that we have an abundance of dead religion. Please don’t misunderstand... I praise you for your faithfulness, but our disregard for God’s Word dominates our lives when we are not gathered here for a service, in God’s House. This is ineffective religion. It does not affect us or cause a change among us, the effect which would change our city. Still, God’s Word is powerful, and it is true.”

Mr. Doran was already nodding off. His head hung low as he unintentionally leaned toward his wife. She tolerated this unwelcome intrusion and years ago decided not to be embarrassed by him. Mrs. Meade was looking across the way as she contemplated the appearance and suggested prosperity of her neighbor which seemed

to be benefitting her kids. How did they afford such brand name clothes? Did Melanie Jackson lose weight? Even Mrs. Shermanski seemed uninterested, glancing toward her watch as she fantasized with the pleasures expected from her Sunday dinner.

“A good friend who became my mentor during a difficult time in my life, once told me that we are all pawns on the chessboard of life, ultimately dominated and controlled by the force we submit to,”

Love remembered and at this moment wondered about John Wright.

“There are warring factions in humanity!” His volume rose.

“Selfishness versus sacrifice. Financial security, our pursuit of and love for money, versus faith and a spiritual quest for sanctification in our relationship with the Lord, even if it means we are to be content with less. We are a selfish people that trust in our accomplishments. We long for more gratifications in this world. And this explains why we have lost our passion for God’s work. We don’t pray desperate prayers for the plights of others... Do we even care?”

Love looked once again, this time seeking an expression of affirmation. None. He was alone and potentially embarking into dangerous territory.

Pastor Rob, sensing the increasing offense like a storm blowing in on a summer afternoon, began to lose confidence in his message. He urgently looked to his notes and the text to reinforce his lesson.

“Please, bear with me. I plead for your grace. This conviction is also for me. I’m not without blame in this regard. I stand before you, judged more severely, and guilty of a greater religious complacency.”

“See verse eleven,” the pastor quickly continued. “God’s grace has appeared and He is saving us.”

“In the next verse, we see that He is training us...”

A man suddenly emerged from the shadows within the rear of the church, coming from the entrance hall and quickly sat in the rear pew that was empty. Love had not seen him before this time. He was nearly bald on top, and the hair on the sides of his head was cut very close, giving him the appearance of a person in the military. He wore dark glasses and a long overcoat. His movements were quick. The pastor wondered at his appearing and momentarily was distracted from delivering his sermon. He could be a harmless visitor serving curiosity, or seeking refuge from the outside elements. Or, he could be one who intended to invade the fragile sense of security Pastor

Love felt at St. James. Love was overwhelmed with suspicion. This man seemed like one with a predetermined motive and a purpose to accomplish.

Not sure how long he paused; the pastor returned his gaze to the regulars and looked upon their faces to see if they had experienced a distraction. Stony, ashen, and expressionless. There had been no resurrection in this cemetery of dreary souls.

“Now in verse 12 we see the work of the Savior as it continues to influence and change us. The gospel is training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions. The appearing of the glory in verse 13 is not the appearance of a physical being, but it is spiritual, it is redemption and results in the purity that encompasses us and transforms us. The purpose of this transformation is stated in verse 14. It is to be possessed by Him, our Great God and Savior, Jesus Christ!”

“Simply put, it is thus,” Pastor Rob could see that he was losing his audience. “God’s grace is saving us, training us, preparing us, and possessing us... to be zealous.”

“Let me state it yet another way,” the pastor was attempting to save his sermon. “Religion is positional, Jesus is relational, but the Holy Spirit is sensational!”

([Holy Spirit: Joh 14:26, Joh 16:7, Joh 16:12-13. Share with a friend.](#))

As he scanned the faces of those sitting before him in the pews he came upon a bright, broad and glorious smile. It was on the brightened face of Thrisa. Perhaps he had reached one, as a spark ignited, this smile was glowing with the potential of igniting the dried tinder all around. Pastor Rob smiled in return. He felt a growing desire to become better acquainted with this young woman.

“I will close with two more verses from the next chapter. Please return to Titus, chapter 3, verse 5.

“(5) he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, (6) whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,”

“His saving is positional, and relational. Because of His mercy, He has cleansed us and His cleansing is causing us to be regenerated. Make this spiritual process relational by talking to Jesus, our Savior. He understands our humanity. Confess your sins before the

Resurrected Lord to increase your cleansing. Don't we all need this – even every day?"

“Ask for His Spirit to be poured out upon you. Let God possess you. Then you can expect something sensational.”

The pastor, empty as the box of a pizza consumed, bowed his head in prayer and closed his eyes.

“We thank you for your Word of Truth. May it change our hearts and quicken our souls to receive your grace, we pray in Jesus name, amen.”

He made one quicker glance upon the auditorium before exiting the platform. The mysterious man was gone.

In a different place, in a den of evil, others plotted to bring damnation to those they hated with a fury. Thrisa, the former “special girl” of the city’s leading thug, Daren Roster, dealer of illegal substances and provider of illicit physical pursuits, was the primary target of their revenge. Roster’s loathing spewed forth as daggers hurled at their victims. He raged against the Jesus freaks at St. James, “Pastor Robby the Snobby,” as he called him, and all religion, for that matter.

Three days later, late Wednesday afternoon, Love felt an urgent need to escape the confines of his office and decided to walk the four blocks required to reach the post office. As he walked along Jefferson Avenue, he began to cross an alley that extended off to his right, fitted closely between two buildings. He suddenly had that unexpected thought, an inclination, even a directive, to enter this undesirable space. Love stopped in his tracks.

He looked down the darkened alley. He was struck by a disgusting smell, the searing stench of decaying garbage. His senses were aroused. Under his feet he now observed a greenish yellow liquid. It was thick and slowly oozed around the soles of his shoes as it found passage underneath, in front of his heels. Slowly it proceeded toward the storm sewer grate located along the edge of the street. His eyes adjusted and he could see a wall that connected the buildings, about fifty feet from his observation point. In front of the wall was a filthy dumpster.

The thought persisted. "*Go into the alley.*" Love rejected it, reminding himself that danger often lurks in such places. He should move on, and quickly. He turned to leave, but the idea came yet again, this time louder in his brain, it aroused his emotions with a surge of adrenalin as he dropped his foot back to its prior place.

“God help me,” he prayed silently as he turned to enter the alley. Slowly, cautiously, he proceeded forward as the objects possessed by this lair of urban remorse, things discarded in repudiation of welfare and the efforts of bringing renewal to the downtown area became discernible to him. There was the expected litter: papers and food containers from a fast food restaurant, the empty discarded can of an energy drink, a whiskey bottle with jagged edges, its bottom smashed off, a stained and crumpled coat soaking in the puddle supplied by the fluid leaching from the dumpster.

As he got closer to the container, he saw an item which he recognized. At first it startled him and brought confusion. He saw a flash of gold, as something glistened in the dim light. A scarf, with alternating squares of red and pink colors, was hanging from the inside top edge of the dumpster and dangling outside it. *“Oh my God, no,”* Love urgently prayed.

Suddenly, awareness of time and place faded, time stalled, and Love entered another realm. He was panicking. He lifted on the dumpster lid with one hand but it did not relent to its intended confinement. Now, with more determination than common sense, Love placed both palms under the bar that formed the front of the heavy dumpster lid, bent his knees dropping slightly, and used all the

strength he had to push it upward. With a grunt from his person and a screech from the metal hinge on the rear of the container, the lid came up and fell back against the wall behind.

Love gasped. His heart palpitated. He blinked hard to check his vision and correct his senses. Looking back at him was the now pale face that had glowed in church three days earlier. It was Thrisa.

Love darted his hand into his jacket pocket and fumbled for his cell phone, dropping it to the greasy gravel below. With tears interfering, he sought for it in the shadows.

He quickly dialed 911.

“Stanton 911 services.” The voice was monotone and emotionless. “What is your emergency?”

“I, I, I... found,” Love stuttered. “It’s the body of a girl in a dumpster,” he stammered. “Get here quick,” he now yelled. “She needs help!” he demanded.

Love reluctantly but lovingly reached for her hand. It was still warm. Suddenly he was struck with confusion and fear. “*Should I stay with her?*” his heart said yes. “*Or should I go out to the street so they can find us?*” his logical mind said no to the first question and then yes to the second, as it offered sensible instruction.

He continued to hold her hand as if providing consolation, or life support. He looked at her body. Her other arm was not visible, most likely folded underneath. She was fully clothed but had no jacket, and strangely, her shoes were missing... maybe they had fallen off. Love looked intently, closer. There were no signs of physical injury. No blood.

Her eyes were tightly closed offering no immediate hope, no sign of life. Love moved her hand to his left one, and placed the fingers of his right hand upon her wrist, seeking a pulse, hoping, hoping, hoping... *“Am I too late,,, or is there hope?”* he wondered to himself.

“Please, God, save her.” At first he thought he imagined it – a slight pressure felt against his forefinger. Then it repeated. There was a pulse, although faint. Love strained for verification. “Thank God.”

Off in the distant he heard the faint but distinguishable sound of a siren.

“Thrisa, hold on. Help is coming.”

She had been overdosed against her will, but now her life was saved in the nick of time.

17. Arrested

Two Months Later

As a courtesy to the man who had been respected by the police department, they came in an unobtrusive way - no sirens. They had not notified the newspaper and purposely shunned the reporters that frequently loitered around their offices sniffing for a scoop. There would be no handcuffs used. After soliciting a statement from the accused at the police station, they would next be required to take him to the office of the District Justice for arraignment. At that point, Love would be transported in the Sheriff's car. The snoops of the press regarded closely the movement of this cruiser and rushed to position their cameras for the "walk of shame," along the sidewalk that led from the parking lot to the judge's front door. The Sheriff Deputies always dragged their prisoners along this very same pathway. Most often, the cops were pleased to hear the accusatory questions fired like buckshot at their alleged criminal.

In Love's case, however, there had been whispering near the water cooler and in the chief's office, out of sight of the window in his door. They planned to use a rear parking space and the rear door to the judge's office. This is where "His Honor" also parked. Unofficially, a detective placed a call to Sheri, his secretary, to be sure the door was unlocked and the building was easily accessible. What would happen next was entirely up to the judge. The police chief, who regarded his faith as helpful in difficult times and important to his family, privately hoped that Love would be quickly released on his own recognizance, and instructed Officer Anderson to wait outside, ready to rescue the forlorn man. The personal humiliation he would suffer would be enough. The public's awareness of the proceedings would surely ruin him. Innocent until proven guilty? Not if the newspaper ran his picture on the front page of the morning edition. His personal distress would be inconceivable. He would never recover professionally. He would not be able to live in this town any longer. All that would survive would be the shell of a defeated and ruined man.

So it seems that everyone in Stanton is not that bad, perhaps Love had even impacted some of them in a positive way.

Pastor Rob was still unaware of the source of the accusation and the justification of the charges in this allegation of sexual assault. He wondered who his accuser might be, and did not realize at the moment how very soon he would meet her.

He sat on the third pew and waited in the front of the sanctuary. He absentmindedly stared at the altar. It was a place of forgiveness and cleansing. He had been commissioned to be an agent of God's mercy. Now, none of it made any sense.

Since his questioning at the police station two weeks ago, Pastor Rob had hardly been able to function in his official capacity and truly was unable to perform in the unofficial capacity required of his now frail faith: love, the essence of it all.

He had received a courtesy call while in his office that morning. It was from Officer Davis, the son of parishioners who had not attended services since he was questioned. Now he understood why. People were already beginning to distance themselves from Love.

They were coming. "Sorry." They will be discrete. "The DA has decided to press charges. Call your attorney. Again, sorry. We will explain it all to you at the police station."

Despite the turmoil that raged inside the man, all was calm and quiet outside the church building. Love heard the front door open.

A long minute passed. “Pastor Love, is that you?”

Slowly, reluctantly, he stood to face his captor. The man dressed in full uniform came forward.

“It distresses me to tell you, Robert Love, but I must... I am placing you under arrest for the sexual assault of a minor, third degree. You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law.”

“You have the right to an attorney. If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be provided for you.”

“Do you understand the rights which I have just read to you?”

Silence... then a nod for the affirmative.

“With these rights in mind, do you wish to speak to me?”

A confused glare... then a nod for the negative.

“Pastor Rob, I am sorry. This is required.”

A weak voice crackled, “I understand.”

“We’re trying to keep this out of the public’s eye – confidential for your sake. I don’t have to use the handcuffs or hold onto your arm if you promise to be cooperative. Is that agreeable?”

“Thank you.”

“Then let’s go. I parked the car up along the next block.”

As the two men exited the church and walked along the sidewalk it would have appeared to the locals as a normal everyday occurrence. The cops were looking for information from the local clergy. They were friendly and cooperative with each other. But a young man who had been watching intently knew something more. Wearing a hooded sweatshirt with baggy jeans low on his hips, he reached into his front pants pocket for his phone. It was his job to keep his boss man informed.

The walk into the police was also casual and uneventful. Robert Love, the accused, was taken to an office separated from the reception area by large glass panels. He immediately wished for more privacy, feeling that he was on display, like a fish in a tank. The officer motioned toward a stackable chair, the single seat on the side of a table that faced the front desk of the station. On the table was a pencil and a legal pad, yellow, 8 1/2x14. Love reluctantly took a seat as the officer exited the cubicle.

He waited approximately 20 minutes until a plain clothes detective entered the room. During that time Love realized that no one seemed interested in his presence and began to observe the proceedings

around him. Detective Jimmy Dickens offered a smile and a hand in greeting.

“Now let’s relax,” he suggested. “Have you called your attorney?”

“I really don’t have one,” Love countered.

“Do you want the public defender?”

Love paused and looked to the writing pad. “I’m sorry. I just can’t believe this is happening to me.”

“We’ll notify the DA of your need for a PD. But right now I’d like to hear your story, and we need you to write it down, an account of what happened.”

“I.. I don’t know what to say...”

Dickens clenched his jaw and as he appeared to become annoyed, they heard people talking nearby, and these voices were louder than others.

The detective glanced toward the noise. “Ah... excuse me.” He quickly left the room.

“Take her to the room in the back,” someone said. Love observed a uniform escort a young girl past his glass room. She was tall, and slender, with a pretty face covered in lots of make-up. Her long brown hair was tossed by the wind. She wore a tight blouse with small

buttons that went all the way down the front to her waist, skin tight designer jeans with holes in the knees, and her wardrobe was finished with designer shoes, high heel stilettos with open toes and long straps that crossed on the ankles and continued up her calves. She was holding back, twisting and turning even as the profanities shot forth. She was leaning back, chest protruded, as they pushed her by.

Remembering her, Love quickly looked away, hoping not to be noticed.

The door banged lightly. "Did you recognize her," Dickens asked as he entered.

"Yes," Love answered honestly. "I met her at the church."

"And were you alone with her?"

"Yes, but only for a few moments," the pastor felt his defenses rising. "I instructed her to come back another time when someone else, a deacon or deaconess would also be present."

"It is church policy," Love suggested.

"Please explain," the detective replied.

"I was in my office as usual," Love began.

"What day and time was that, exactly?" Dickens interrupted.

Love felt uncertain of his memory. Everything was foggy in his mind today, like one scared and tired after being drilled on the witness

stand for many hours. “It was last month. The second week, a Friday, I believe.”

The detective raised his eyebrows in objection and reached for the door knob. “Charlie,” he yelled. “Get me a calendar.”

As Love glanced that way he saw a man standing at the front desk counter. Again there was recognition. It was the man who had come into the church during a recent service and sat in the back row: hair short, dark glasses, a long overcoat.

“Jimmy, you’re requested,” Charlie shouted in return.

Dickens turned for instruction and Charlie jerked his head toward the person Love was wondering about.

His chair scrapped on the tile floor as the cop quickly stood. “Sorry.”

Dickens greeted the mysterious man with a hand shake and they disappeared down a hallway.

Pastor Love sat motionless. On the wall in front of him above the glass wall was a large round clock with a plain face. He watched the second hand as it labored along the dashes from the large number eight to the number nine. He wrung his hands. They were sweaty. His torturous wait continued. His head began to hurt inside.

Fifteen long minutes passed – 900 laborious hurdles accomplished by the long narrow pointer on the clock. Love couldn't stand to watch it any longer. He wondered if he should make an inquiry – maybe request a bathroom break. “*No, just stay put. They know you're here.*”

There passed another twenty minutes and Love placed his head on the table, his arms folded underneath. “*Lord, have mercy,*” he pleaded. “*What are they doing?*”

The door rattled and Love jumped in his chair.

“Sorry to keep you waiting,” the detective had finally returned. “I'd like to hear the rest of your story. You were in your office... at the church? We have the date.”

“Yes,” Love answered. “I always leave the front door open for visitors.”

“Do you think that is wise?” Dickens interrupted.

“Maybe not. I don't know. But there are two alarms silent to them that alert me of their whereabouts.”

“Please continue.”

“I heard the first alarm. Someone had entered the church. Next they usually come into the front office. I waited forty seconds to hear the alarm on that door. It never sounded.”

“OK pastor,” the detective seemed to be relaxing a little. “What did you do next?”

“I went to see where they had gone. No one was in the front office so I continued into the hall. The front door was closed, so I went into the sanctuary. Then I saw her...”

“Was it that girl you just saw go by, about thirty minutes ago?” Dickens interrupted.

“Was it only half an hour?” Love questioned himself. He feared that he was losing clarity to his situation. He pressed against confusion and anxiety.

“Yes, that was her.”

“What is her name,” the cop demanded.

“I don’t know. Like I said, I only spoke to her for a moment... I didn’t ask her.”

“Did you sit with her?” Dickens inquired.

“Oh, she is a minor,” he explained, “at least that is what she claims. Since you are accused of a serious crime, I will tell you her name. Danelle Richards... or so she says. Recently moved here from New York.”

“I didn’t know,” Love replied. “No, I didn’t sit with her. She was sitting about midway in the sanctuary. I stood in the aisle as I talked to her.”

“And you said what?” Dickens demanded.

“I introduced myself and asked if I could help her in any way. She said she was having personal problems... I think...”

“I told her she would have to come back another time,” Love continued. “Then she got up, brushed past me, and walked out the front door.”

“She has a witness,” the detective threatened.

“There was no one else there,” the pastor answered with suspicion.

Dickens straightened in his chair. “OK, let me check on it.” And he left Love alone once again.

This time only ten minutes lapsed. Love saw him approaching. “*Thank God,*” he thought to calm his nerves.

“Did you see that man I went out to talk to before?” Dickens asked. “Did you recognize him?”

“Yes, he visited the church once... Sat in the back. He was gone before I had the chance to greet him. I don’t know who he is,” the pastor explained poorly, thinking that he must sound foolish.

“Well the good news is...” Dickens gloated. “He has vouched for you.”

Love was more than puzzled. He was frustrated and felt exhaustion pressing upon his stressed, hurting brain.

“Let me explain,” Detective Dickens offered.

And the mystery unfolded.

The man unknown to Pastor Love was Gerald Delaney. He was a former cop with a notorious record of meritorious service. Retired fifteen years ago. He had always lived and served in Stanton.

“Remember the girl you found in the dumpster?” Dickens asked. “You saved her life.”

“Yes, Thrisa,” Love affirmed.

“That’s her father. They parted ways many years ago, when she went bad – to the other side. She resented her dad for being a cop. They weren’t talking so he ignored her calls.”

“Sorry, that was bad for you,” the detective seemed to be apologetic. “Thrisa had met Danelle for lunch the day she ended up in the hospital. She got a roofie in her drink, then an injection in her arm. They intended to kill her... you know...”

“A roo-fy,” Love asked.

“The club drug, ecstasy,” Dickens answered abruptly. “Thrisa knew that Danelle was with Roster, probably his new top girl, but she had asked Tris to help her escape.”

“I think I’m getting it,” Love noted with questions swirling in his mind.

“So after she got released from the hospital, Thrisa heard on the street that Roster was planning to frame you. He had another girl on the front steps of the church to wait for Miss Danelle Richards, who was crying when she left your church... so she could be a witness, I mean this other girl.”

“Oh, no,” the pastor moaned.

“Delaney being the stubborn old crank he is was refusing his daughter’s calls. He’s sick you know. I’m surprised he made it in here today.”

“No, I didn’t know,” Love answered.

“Cancer. Prostrate I think. But he’s got it bad. It spread thru his entire body.”

“Anyway, you’re free to go!” Dickens exclaimed.

“There won’t be a trial...” Love pondered aloud.

“Nope. Charges are being dropped. Ol’ Delaney carries clout here. His word is good enough for me. Turns out the DA is wrong. Will be glad to see her eat this one.” Dickens’ speech was losing its formality.

The detective smiled and again offered his hand for amiability. “Sorry pastor for the troubles. We had to check it out, you know... Hope you won’t hold a grudge.”

Love grasped the hand and smiled slightly, more like a forced grin, the first glimmer of his teeth to show in months. “Oh my god, I am so relieved.”

“We’re going to get that thug... He won’t get away with this. I think this Danelle is using a fake ID. She most likely is not even a minor. We will get to the bottom of it. She will roll on him. We’ll get that creep. We’re still building the case against him for Delaney’s daughter.”

Love was trying to take it all in.

“Hey, he could have done you worse,” Dickens offered in reconciliation. “In other precincts reverends have been shot, or their churches burned... Some plan this kid had to frame you... Pretty smart actually.”

Love was silent.

“But hey, glad it all worked out... See, that’s why we kept it all on the QT. The damn press would have crucified you...” His speech was getting even freer now.

“But don’t worry,” the detective concluded. “We’ll get him...”

Dickens opened and held the door open for the pastor. It was his first step into freedom, not just from the confining office space and smothering interval of time that lingered on and on, but also from the darkness that persisted since he had been accused of the alleged crime, as it a new day dawned.

Love walked toward the door, not even thinking how he would get home. He had drowned and now resuscitated, he was unsure of his whereabouts. He nearly lost his balance in his next step.

“Hey,” Dickens yelled. “Want a squad car to take you home?”

18. A View of Heaven

Two weeks passed before Pastor Love received a telephone call from a strange voice, one he did not recognize and had not previously conversed with on the telephone.

“Hello, Pastor Rob, St. James...”

“Hi Pastor, this is Thrisa.”

“Well Hi, Thrisa,” his voice and mood brightened. “How are you doing?”

“Oh, much better, thanks. I’m clean and staying with my Dad for awhile... That’s the reason I called... He’s asking to see you.”

The Delaney home was in the north side, a section that was constructed as the city saw new development in the late 40’s. The houses were small ranch style homes, all brick, and modest by today’s standards. Many had never been altered, mostly because of the solid brick exterior, but also because their lot size prevented additions due to the new

setbacks stipulated by the zoning laws updated and approved more recently. The shrubs were overgrown, most trees had been removed either by wind storms or conscientious homeowners, and the sidewalks were heaved and crumbling. The house provided 1100 square feet of living space. Typically the only bathroom was down a short hallway from the dining area adjacent to the kitchen. There were three tiny bedrooms.

Pastor Rob was greeted at the door by Thirsa who appeared to be somber, saddened by the impending death of her father. They had lost the last six years, a harsh time when she expressed hatred for him, and he disgust toward her. The time lost could never be recovered.

Her mother had fled from their dysfunctional family many years before. She now lived somewhere in California. She had no contact with Thirsa, her first child and only daughter. This woman didn't want to be hampered by her daughter's problems as she enjoyed a new and improved lifestyle. Gerald, she said, belonged to his job. Her loneliness became unbearable as she tried drudgingly to serve as housewife and mother. It was a load she was unable to bear. She needed to escape, and did flee. On her second attempt at a relationship, she scored and married money. Her days are now filled with luncheons, visits to the spa,

shopping, and generally self pampering. A nanny takes care of her new son.

Thrisa heard the rumor of a sibling, but never met her half-brother.

“Thanks for coming,” she offered at the front door. “He’s in here.”

The house was dark inside. The windows had heavy curtains and those on the sunny side of the building also had their blinds drawn. A hospital bed replaced the dining room table. Prescription bottles and junk mail littered the buffet top. Two greetings cards stood upright, seemingly out of place.

Her eyes glistened with the remnants of tears just wiped.

A table chair waited alongside the bed. Gerald did not move or acknowledge the pastor as he approached.

Pastor Rob quietly sat upon the chair and turned toward the ill stricken man. He was ashen in color. Plastic pouches hung on the stand for intravenous drugs, located on the opposite side of the bed. Tubes from them were connected at intersections in the route that led to his left hand, resting on top of the blanket. Love looked over his shoulder, expecting to see a hospice nurse nearby, but saw no one.

After a few long moments Gerald roused slightly, and slowly turned his head toward his visitor. It was supported by several pillows that formed a pyramid below his upper body.

He smiled weakly and lifted his right hand, attempting to reach for his final guest.

Love graciously took it and gently held his hand, dry and cold, and momentarily, their hearts were linked together.

“You saved my daughter. I haven’t had the chance to thank you,” Gerald’s words were labored but carefully and clearly spoken. He was completing the one final task he was capable of. Others would remain undone, on his unwritten list of final wishes, his bucket list.

“I’m just glad I was in the right place at the right time,” Love explained.

“You’re God’s man...” he paused. “You’re modest.”

“You saved her twice,” Delaney insisted.

Love wondered at the meaning of his words, and then thought he might be referring to her salvation, the spiritual change that made their reunion possible.

“No,” he gently countered. “It was all God. He is merciful to us. God was watching over Thrisa.”

Gerald nodded slightly and turned away. His hand became heavier.

Love reverently waited for the dying man to respond and watched for an opportunity to continue conversing.

“Jesus loves you... He died for your sins,” Love interrupted the silence after waiting a few moments.

Gerald brightened slightly once again and turned his head back toward the pastor. The expression on his face was peaceful and longing at the same time.

“Jesus forgives you,” Love continued as they made eye contact. As he watched the man lying prostrate before him, Gerald’s eyes hardened and his stare became piercing, like an armor penetrating bullet fired from a handgun, such as the one he holstered for many years in service to his community; it was intended to shatter anything fake about the pastor and his invitation. “If you trust in Him,” Love concluded certain of his purpose, confident in his mission intended to save the man’s soul, and not weakened in his resolve by the shot that surely hit its target.

His hand shook slightly. “I know, and I have,” Delaney replied.

Pastor Rob smiled, relaxed slightly, and nodded with approval.

“Are you ready to meet Him?” he inquired affectionately.

“Yes... I am ready.”

The body of the man was weak but his spirit was strong, the two no longer compatible for, or capable of, cohabitation. It was his time to leave earth’s nest, as one destined to soar to new heights. His time of training was over.

Love sensed that Jesus had come and was completing the miracle of His resurrection for another, one redeemed by the Lord’s grace.

This fledgling was soon to be free from his physical confinement.

Love waited and watched.

“Thank you, Jesus!” Delaney suddenly said with a clear, stronger voice.

“Pastor, I have peace now...”

Gerald Delaney closed his eyes.

“The Lord is welcoming me home. Oh, it is glorious! Heaven is all love, light, peace, joy. Look there... over there under that beautiful tree. Among the lilies...”

“I see a young woman with a newborn baby. They are both laughing.”

Suddenly, Gerald laughed aloud. “Ha, ha ha!”

“They are so very, very happy together. I have never seen such joy!”

([heaven](#): Joh 14:2-3, Rev 21:10-11, 18, 21-23, 4, 2Co 4:14, 2Co 5:1,8, Phi 3:20-21. [Share with a friend](#).)

“But why?...”

The pastor was stunned to hear this question stated by a man at death’s threshold.

“Why did the baby boy arrive first?” Delaney asked.

Love puzzled. Who was he speaking to?

“Now I understand,” Gerald continued, obviously conversing with someone in another place, far beyond the realms of earth.

“Oh yes, I see. She was not to be without her newborn son. He was not to be without his loving mother. They are complete together.”

“Look at them... They are celebrating eternal life together... God’s mercy! Such a loving Heavenly Father!” Delaney exclaimed.

The pastor began to make the association as he remembered the tragic deaths of the baby, Matthew Jason Wilson, and then the mother, Diane Wilson, just weeks later. He began to see God’s goodness in it all. Yes, the child born premature arrived first...

Revelation.

New understanding.

Awe.

Contemplation.

“Thank you, Jesuuuu...” and the old man’s voice softened, even lingered on his last vowel. Then he peacefully exhaled his last breath. He was gone. And a smile, the remnant of joy, lingered on his face.

Pastor Love suddenly realized why a window was just then opened into heaven. It delivered a message, even more importantly, an answer to a lingering question he had prayed frequently.

Like an infected wound, the question had cut into his heart and it had since continued to bleed into his soul with doubting. The pain of this wound was smothering his faith as it dominated his unconscious thought. It was the question that this pastor had been unable to resolve many times before.

Now, true love demonstrated the answer.

It explains “**why.**”

Robert's spirit soared. He was enlightened to God's Providence. And he felt sure that he would never doubt or question the Father's goodness again.

The Lord is working all the time to save, bless, and redeem the lives of his sons and daughters with enduring love. His love is more than we can comprehend! His love never ends.

Love Endures – 1Corinthians 13:7

Hope Abounds – Romans 15:13

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Glossary: Insights on Excerpts

(Quotes in Bible text are Jesus' words.)

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Adopted: “Ah yes, my friend, that’s right. God is faithful to his sons. We have been adopted into the family of God, with the full rights of sons, and a complete inheritance.”

Rom 8:12-17, 1Pe 1:3-5, 1Jo 3:1-2: So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"

The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a

salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

A son has full privileges and legal rights in the household of his father. A son is the heir.

I held a baby boy in front of a State Judge as I sought a legal adoption. The judge asked me why I wanted to adopt the small child. He cautioned me on the finality of the adoption decree. There would be no canceling it. The adoption could not be overturned. I would always be responsible, even if the baby boy grew into a rebellious teenager or young adult who acted illegally.

I had a father's heart full of joy and answered affirmatively with great assurance and confidence.

It is this way with God and me, or you, when you accept Him. He always wants to adopt us. His love and commitment is beyond measure.

Are you a child of the King?

Attacked: The eyes of the evil one grew even brighter as if they observed Robert's distress with pleasure. His archenemy, this attacker, intended to destroy this man, who just then thought he saw something or someone moving within the inferno. Again, he heard the haunting cry of maddening joust. Suddenly the windows exploded, throwing daggers of broken glass directly at Robert. They fell at his feet, just short of penetrating his body. It was more than Love could bear.

1Pe 5:8, Heb 2:14-15, Jam 4:7: Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

Satan hates us and desires to destroy us. But the person reconciled to God in Christ Jesus is free from the power of evil and protected by the Savior!

Do disturbing thoughts often torment you?

Blamed: “So what about the innocent victims in earthquakes, or war?” Love demanded.

“See, that is the crux of it,” Wright replied. “You will blame God, and hold an offense against Him, but the most significant thing about that choice is that you are personally rebelling and siding with the accusation of evil. You bought into the propaganda, but don’t even fully know or understand what happened.”

Now he felt a little irritated as Love shifted in his seat.

Mat 11:5-6, 2Pe 3:9: “The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”

The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

Don’t believe the lie of Satan who is the cause of your pain.

Don’t believe Satan as he blames God for what evil has done. Satan will

have you in captivity if he can convince you to believe an accusation against God. Satan wants you to hold an offense against God. This will cause a breach in your relationship with God. This lie is your spiritual enemy's greatest deception. It is a snare and a trap. But God is Love, and He wants to heal you.

What are you blaming God for?

Condemned: The sweet memories brought little comfort, but stirred a greater remorse. They served as a summons to a judgement, not of what he had accomplished in life, but to a conviction of his pressing failure and loss. Love heard a proclamation of death, much like a murderer standing before his judge for the sentencing of his crime. The courtroom of his life had convicted him. The smiles of the past had been the jury that delivered the verdict.

"What value does my life have," he wondered to himself. "We are all irrelevant. All we do is consume."

John 3:18, Psa 31:10, Psa 32:4-7: "whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God."

For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my iniquity, and my bones waste away. For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.

For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah.

I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah.

Therefore let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found; surely in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him.

You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with shouts of deliverance. Selah.

Our Loving Father waits for the prodigal son or daughter to return. All you have to do is to initiate an honest conversation with Him in prayer. God lends his ear to the humble. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

Are you happy with your life?

Deceived: “People are confused and deceived about God. He is not a vindictive ruler that remains distant to us. He wants to be personal, and it is intimacy that the Creator desires.”

Wright continued, “People need to understand the choices they are making, and the significance of those choices. When it comes to spiritual things, most people don’t understand. The forces of evil are speaking to us, persuading us, and leading us into deception. But the person chooses to go there.”

Jam 1:16-17; Psa 139:17,18, 23, 24; 1Jo 4:16-19: Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more than the sand. Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God

abides in him. By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. We love because he first loved us.

God's love for us is more than we can comprehend. Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. For he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things.

What are you asking God for today?

Desired: “We all try to put God in a box,” Wright offered in reconciliation. “That’s such foolish religion. God is not controlled, or contained. He sets the standard, not us. He is Holy, a Consuming Fire. We can only approach Him in truth in absolute humility.”

“Starting to sound a little scary,” Love reiterated.

“Well, some represent that consuming fire in judgement. I see it in the degree of intimacy He desires. Let me tell you, He is very intense on loving you.”

Zep 3:17, John 3:16 -17, 14:21: The LORD your God is with you; his power gives you victory. The LORD will take delight in you, and in his love he will give you new life. He will sing and be joyful over you,

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

“And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him."

God created you because He loves you and longs to have a meaningful and intimate relationship with you. He cares for your every need.

Is it possible that there is a love that is greater than you have ever known?

Despised: “Three more days, and it would have been over. You were supposed to die,” she moaned. Then her temper flared. “I hate God for the day he saved you!”

The words hit Robert hard. His mind reeled for a response.

“No,” he spoke softly. “You can’t mean that.”

“Oh, but I do,” Eve’s eyes flared, becoming wide in fury. “I can’t take it anymore.” She paused. “Robert, I’ve had enough. You’re no good. You’re god is not helping you. You should curse him too.”

Isa 53:3-7, Heb 12:1-3: He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to

the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth.

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.

At times, life is hard, and people who are angry can be cruel. But there is one who has suffered more than you or I ever will. We think of the crucifixion of Jesus and acknowledge His painful and torturous death. He took our place so that we can know healing and be free from distress.

Have you considered the life of rejection that Jesus endured in love?

Empowered: “It is grace,” Wright replied. “It is God’s abiding presence, His Spirit, that enables and empowers us to be victorious in our life struggles. It is strength from within, and a focused mind that knows His peace when temptation and doubt try to steal the goodness of God, our Savior, from us.”

1Jo 4:4, Zec 4:6, Eph 3:16, 2Pe 1:3, Eph 1:19, 20, 6:10, Phi 4:13.

Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

This is the word of the LORD saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD.

...that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,

...as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue,

...how very great is his power at work in us who believe. This power working in us is the same as the mighty strength which he used when he raised Christ from death and seated him at his right side in the

heavenly world.

Finally, build up your strength in union with the Lord and by means of his mighty power.

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

So often we fail simply because we act with our own strength. But it is not superior strength or intellect that we need when trials come. We simply need Jesus, the Savior. His living Spirit unites with our spirit to produce a supernatural confidence, determination, and wisdom that will pull us through even the most difficult of times.

Who are you relying on now?

Faithful: “God, are you still with us?” he asked softly. Then Love heard the words of the Creator, *“Yes my son. I will never leave you or forsake you.”*

Psa 145:13, 2Th 3:3, Psa 111:7-18, Deu 31:6, Heb 13:5: Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations. [The LORD is faithful in all his words and kind in all his works.]

But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.

The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy; they are established forever and ever, to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness.

Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.

...for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Our love is conditional. His love is unconditional. You see,

conditional love lacks faithfulness, but unconditional love is always faithful and true.

Jesus is a faithful friend. He said, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Are you trusting in God now?

Heaven: “Pastor, I have peace now...”

Gerald Delaney closed his eyes.

“The Lord is welcoming me home. Oh, it is glorious! Heaven is all love, light, peace, and joy. Look there... over there under that beautiful tree. Among the lilies...”

“I see a young woman with a newborn baby. They are both laughing.”

Suddenly, Gerald laughed aloud. “Ha, ha ha!”

“They are so very, very happy together. I have never seen such joy!”

Joh 14:2-3, Rev 21:10-11, 18, 21-23, 4, 2Co 4:14, 2Co 5:1,8, Phi 3:20-21:

“In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”

And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from

God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, clear as glass.

And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, transparent as glass. And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.

knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.

For we know that if the tent, which is our earthly home, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

It is our hope – nay- it is His promise and it is our claim. We shall have a new body, one that never hurts or decays. We shall have a new home, one in the presence of the Savior, which is eternal.

Words cannot describe the beauty of Heaven. Our minds cannot fully understand or comprehend the indescribable joy! It is forever.

What is your hope for eternity?

Holy Spirit: Robert Love did not expect to hear an audible voice, but as thoughts, mostly ideas, came, he wondered if they had originated with the Father of Light and Love. Robert prayed not for specific instruction, but for understanding. As his confidence in the guidance of the Holy Spirit increased, he tested new thoughts with what he confidently understood with clarity to be the authoritative teaching of the Bible. God spoke a sonata of love. The accusation of condemnation pronounced against Love was being commuted. Continued study of God's Word, the Holy Bible, confirmed Love's insights.

Joh 14:26, Joh 16:7, Joh 16:12-13: "The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and make you remember all that I have told you."

"But I am telling you the truth: it is better for you that I go away, because if I do not go, the Helper will not come to you. But if I do go away, then I will send him to you."

"I have much more to tell you, but now it would be too much for you to bear. When, however, the Spirit comes, who reveals the truth about God, he will lead you into all the truth. He will not

“speak on his own authority, but he will speak of what he hears and will tell you of things to come.”

Jesus is fully God and fully human. As He stood upon this earth, God embodied in flesh, He tells us that it is better that he goes away - so that we will receive the Holy Spirit. It's hard to understand this, as we desire the tangible Jesus, the person we can know with all of our physical senses.

The institutional church, established religions, often act to minimize the importance of the Holy Spirit, because they want to fill the void, provide that desired physical presence, and take the place of Jesus. It is a temptation for us to make religious figures the scapegoat of our insincere faith. When we refuse to be intimate with God we look for another person, a substitute, to put upon that person or institution the responsibility of our relationship with God. We use religion to distance ourselves from God. This accommodates a selfish and worldly life. Such religion seems to fit, but it is not the plan or intent of God, He who came and died for you and me.

God gave Himself, and sent His Holy Spirit, to create an intimate and abiding presence with the believer. Christ lives in us. We learn to rely on our spiritual senses.

It is ours to strive to know God more, intimately. The Holy Spirit, the Helper, the Comforter, the intercessor, our advocate, will teach and guide us as we live and serve Him.

Are you willing to go deeper with God?

Ignited: “The Son touched him. Like an electric shock, his body surged with energy, and a new life came. Love was reborn.”

2Co 5:17-18, Joh 3:3, 1 Pe 1:3, 23-25: Therefore, if anyone is in Christ,

he is a new creation. The old has passed

away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God,

Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

...since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for ‘All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.’

For there to be life a seed is sprouted, an egg is hatched, a baby is born, and a spirit is ignited. God won't force Himself upon us. He

must be invited. God won't be compromised – He cleans house when He comes. We must be willing.

The key for ignition is repentance.

If your car's engine stops running, you can coast downhill, but you'll never make it up the next one. This is how religious people respond to God. When sinful attractions, temptations, or problems come into their lives, they are powerless to handle them. Their engine has not been ignited. They live for selfish ambition.

A car won't run until we start the motor.

What is the engine of your spiritual life? Has it been ignited?

Inheritance: “I explained that you were a victim of the power and influence of evil, a pawn on the chessboard of life.”

“I remember,” Love said.

“You are no longer a pawn. You are now a prince, a prince that is an heir of the King. You are protected, and powerful.”

Gal 4:4-7, Rom 8:35-39: But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!"

Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

As it is written: "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE KILLED ALL DAY LONG; WE ARE ACCOUNTED AS SHEEP FOR THE SLAUGHTER."

Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him

who loved us.

For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

If you have chosen to trust in Jesus, you are a prince, the son of and heir to the King – it is worth repeating, because our mind rejects the thought. The prince (and princess) has the protection of the king's army. The King's sons and daughters have power in their Father's Kingdom. His is the Kingdom of Light, Love, and Life.

Who, or what, have you chosen to live for?

Ransomed: "Not only are you held captive by evil, but a ransom is required for your release."

"A ransom? Have I been kidnapped?" Robert asked mostly to himself...

"You know about Jesus," John explained. "He is the ransom. God's Son came to cancel religion and establish relationship. You will find God in religion, but you won't find religion in God once you get to know Him better."

Job 33:24, Mar 10:45, Isa 53:5-6, 1Jo 2:2, Joh 8:34-36: ...and he is merciful to him, and says, 'Deliver him from going down into the pit; I have found a ransom;'

"For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

And Christ himself is the means by which our sins are forgiven, and not our sins only, but also the sins of everyone.

Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed."

Ransom is the price paid for release. Jesus gave His life to release us from bondage to sin and death, the grip of evil. The ransom had to be a perfect sacrifice. You see, God's love supercedes the requirement of religion. His sacrifice paid the price!

God considers you to be worth dying for.

Will you let Him stand in your defense?

Rejected: Before Robert could speak, Wright continued, "God is holy and pure. He will not be compromised," he appeared to be on a roll. "We must understand that we have rejected and rebelled against Him, the Creator of light, love, and life. We have lied to Him and spoken against Him, even trying to discredit Him. Yes, we have hurt Him." Wright paused for effect. "It is our rejection of Him that causes our life to be miserable. We have a false confidence. Life doesn't work without God. We may choose to believe the lie of personal success and wealth, but it will eventually fail us completely."

Jer 28:16, Mat 12:37, Joh 3:18, Gal 6:7: Therefore thus says the LORD: 'Behold, I will remove you from the face of the earth. This year you shall die, because you have uttered rebellion against the LORD.'

"...for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows,

that will he also reap.

Have you ever had someone spit in your face, literally, or figuratively? Have their words, spoken against you in a vicious attack, felt like a knife was stabbed into your back? When it happens, you know the anger, even hatred that person has for you. It really hurts.

If you have acted this way toward a spouse, parent, or friend, you will eventually be miserable with remorse and regret.

How have you treated God?

Repentance: "God is Love. He wants to save you from the despair of this world," Wright offered. He seemed to be coming to the climax of his remarks. "Jesus sacrificed His life for you. He suffered and died for you, Robert Love. Now the Heavenly Father wants to welcome you home. In His forgiveness you will find rest, wholeness, and healing for your heart and soul. Ask for His forgiveness. Doing so generates a new spirit and exuberance for life within you."

2Co 7:10: For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.

"Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God," (Rom 10:17). This "*hearing*" truly understands. This kind of understanding involves your mind and your heart. When God is speaking to you, you will feel conviction. God communicates with the person who is humble and repentant, truly willing and wanting to change. Is that you?

There is more than just believing for the person who is reconciled to God. Repentance is crucial in knowing God. For salvation,

there must be spiritual insight and awakening. This is imparted to us in repentance.

Have you asked God to forgive you for rejecting him?

Repented: Robert prayed, "Oh God, I really am worn. I am broken and dead. Can you help me, Lord?" He paused and wiped at his eyes one at a time with his wrists. "I must be held captive, and I have served my own lust and desire," Robert admitted in prayer to his Creator. "Forgive me. I accept your ransom. Take my life, and make it new. I want to live for you and not for myself any longer."

Pro 28:13, Psa 32:3-5, 1Jo 1:5-10: Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.

For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah.

I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah.

This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not

practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

Having an honest conversation with God, the confession of your selfish life, and seeking forgiveness for rejecting and blaming Him – it is the most powerful words you will ever say. Talk to Him now.

Can you be honest with yourself and God?

Salvation: “Robert, this is not religion, it’s relationship. Like those we know in this life, we need to spend time talking to God, to be intimate with him. You will know Him as a faithful friend and as a helper in your time of need. But you must relinquish your former life and the claim of self.” Wright paused. “Have you sensed His presence?” he asked, needing to hear Robert’s confession of faith reaffirmed.

“Yes,” Love offered the assurance sought. “When things are at their worst, when I feel nearly overwhelmed with fear, anger, or discouragement... it is then that I sense a peace that is beyond myself, and I know that it is God.”

Psa 91:14-16, Luk 19:10, Joh 10:10, Mat 11:28-29. I will deliver him; I will protect him, because he knows my name. When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him.

With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation.

“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

“...I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

In the context of religion, salvation is claimed for the future, as it becomes the *position* of the religious faithful. But how relevant is that now? Life is hard, and we need something for today. We need to be saved from present trials and temptation, hurt and pain, and the fear of loss. Today we need the *process* of salvation to be real. Don't allow yourself to be barricaded in a barren fortress of religion. It is God's purpose to help you, even save you now, from whatever threatens you.

What will save you now?

Spiritual Adultery: Here is the principle: it is not difficult to judge sin, but when you condemn the sinner, you have implicated yourself. Judging the wrong is not the problem; it is condemning the person. Even if we have not committed the same offense, we may be guilty of it in spiritual significance. Our expression of condemnation has the potential of being equally as evil. Could this be spiritual adultery - to deny God's mercy?

“So... I will ask for the power to forgive them, and let it pass,” Love concluded as he made his decision. “The pain they have caused I will give to God and ask for His healing.”

Jam 4:4, 1Jo 2:15-16, 1Jo 1:5-7, Col 3:5: You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world-

-the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions--is not from the Father but is from the world.

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

How can we *not* forgive others when we have been forgiven so great a debt?

What is spiritual adultery? It is unfaithfulness in our relationship with the Almighty Spiritual God.

It is hate, revenge, and condemnation. It is unforgiveness toward others in the face of the mercy he gives to us. He suffered and died for me, and for you. He feels rejection when we despise others.

It is idolatry. We use religion, a system of regulation and belief that elevates the position of man and diminishes God, to gain personal justification. It is self-reliance. This is the worship of self and false gods.

It is indulgence. How can we love the pleasures of this world, more than we love Him? Selfishness and worldliness will lead us into spiritual adultery.

A dependency on self-achievement and success for meaning and purpose in life is a striving which results in defeat with the realization of age, disease, and death. Surely, this isn't Gods way or The Way with Him.

Confessions of spiritual adultery:

Worldliness: there are so many things that looked good to me. I wanted them and pursued them for myself, with disregard to what You were telling me was wrong. I have been so selfish in my pursuit of pleasure. I have indulged myself with what I could get, and have resented what I could not get. The happiness I found has always been fleeting. I continually sought to fulfill my selfish lust, even using others to get what I wanted for myself. Now I know that I have been wrong. This is my confession before You, Jesus. Please forgive me and wash me clean by the sacrifice of your blood, shed for the earthly wrongs I have done before you.

Self-sufficiency: I have been confident in my abilities and have rejected your Spirit of wisdom and love. I have relied entirely on myself. I have lived for self-fulfillment. As I have achieved my goals, they have been unworthy - not bringing any true or lasting satisfaction. I have been proud in myself and I have spoken against you. But now I know and see my need for You, because I have failed in myself to accomplish anything that is truly good, or even right. I need You, Jesus, to bring healing love into my life. Please forgive me for self-sufficiency, and renew in me the power of your resurrected life.

Self-righteousness: In truth, my religious activity has been to justify myself. I wasn't honest about my own sin. I wanted to hide it and cover it over, so I could appear to be as good, or better than others, and...I have been critical of them. I have been quick to criticize and judge others for their actions, but have not been honest about my own faults. Help me now, Jesus, to know the complete truth about my false justification. Expose the deception of religion in my life. I abandon it now, to have You: your righteousness, truth, and life. Please forgive me for my self-righteousness as I accept your higher standard and trust only in You.

How are things with you and Jesus? Are you two-timing in your relationship with God?

Tempted: Although Robert would have welcomed the emotional relief, he could not cry. In an unpredictable instant, his mind suddenly reeled away from self-pity and remorse to consider instead a surge of raging anger. His ears were red and burning.

Emotions flooded upon this broken man as he sat on the floor of his foyer and contemplated the evidence of his shattered life. He placed the palms of his hands on the surface behind his back to support himself.

Robert closed his eyes and let a parade of evil ensuing thoughts press upon him, and then, just as quickly, his mind recoiled, proceeding into a void of nothingness not known in physical reality. He continued to sit there, his head bowed, his mind spinning. Slowly the evil presence of hatred and revenge eased away from him. It was like he had been buried alive, and then slowly uncovered to be resurrected from the grave. But, what had saved him?

Sensing a change, something happening in the spiritual realm unseen, Robert continued to wait, in anticipation of what would come next, whether it was hurtful or healing, good or bad. Slowly, a calming peace settled upon his soul. Although his heart was aching, a stronger spirit, one of assurance was making an entry into his mind. Robert could

not understand its coming. At first he rejected the thought, but it persisted. He waited a little longer, and quietness came. Robert wondered what this meant.

1Pe 5:8, 1Co 10:13, Heb 2:18, 1Pe 5:6-7: Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

The Black Panther jumps and pounces on its prey, expecting to devour it. But the Protector has seen it coming, and instead of a successful kill for the cougar, it is struck with a devastating blow by the spear from the shepherd.

Because of his humanity, Jesus understands our struggles and knows what to expect from the enemy. The Risen Lord is the spiritual warrior victorious and He has defeated the devil. Jesus is always here for you.

Are you depending on Jesus today?

Transformed: It completed and filled him. A transformation occurred in Robert Love, the flesh man, as his spirit was filled with the healing and true love of the Savior.

The Son touched him. Like an electric shock, his body surged with energy, and a new life came. Love was reborn.

Joh 3:5-6, Rom 12:2 , 2Co 4:16 –18: Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which

are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.

For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

I will admit, that in this life it is difficult to always have a spiritual perspective. Pray, read God's Word, meditate and memorize Scripture, and act on what He instructs you to do. Trust God the Father during times of doubt. He is faithful to bring about an amazing change in your inner being and in your life! This transformation is the present day work of the Creator.

Are you seeking the understanding you need for the change you desire?

Trinity: “It is God’s abiding presence, His Spirit, that enables and empowers us to be victorious in our life struggles.”

Joh 15:26, 16:13: "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.”

“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth...”

God is infinitely so much more than we can ever comprehend or understand. He is eternity. He is creation. He is wisdom. He is sacrificial, life giving love.

He reveals Himself primarily to us in three ways, often using His Word, the Bible. As water is known in three different forms, based on atmospheric conditions, God reveals Himself based on your spiritual need.

H₂O is liquid, solid, and steam. God is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This unique Revelation of the Supreme Being in three

different ways meets our many and varied needs.

The goal is for us to truly know Him and understand Him, and with respect and reverence be intimate with Him, and connected. The Trinity supercedes the barriers of your natural life to fulfill the need of your spiritual life in Christ.

Know Him as a Loving Father, a True Companion, and a Wise Teacher.

What do you need God to be for you now?

Post Script

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