

*Like an eagle, God made you for more –  
He made you to SOAR!*



# SOAR

*THE WAY OF THE EAGLES*

JOE R. GARMAN



**SOAR – The Way of the Eagles**

by Joe R. Garman

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*A Tip of the Wing to  
my steadfast parents,  
my lovely wife and  
both of my beautiful daughters  
and their families:  
Eagle Christians All!*

### **THE EAGLE**

*“He clasps the crag with crooked hands:  
Close to the sun in lonely lands,  
Ringed with the azure world, he stands.*

*The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;  
He watches from his mountain walls,  
And like a thunderbolt he falls.”*

**-ALFRED TENNYSON**





## FROM THE AUTHOR

Within these pages, you are invited to catch a higher vision and soar with new understanding as you discover the many times God refers to His followers as mighty eagles. With such a pronouncement straight from heavenly authority, it is no wonder that man should then recognize this regal raptor as the greatest of all the birds that fill our skies today.

In *SOAR - THE WAY OF THE EAGLES* you will read about some of the Lord's greatest Eagle Christians from the pages of Scripture, the annals of world history and through the stories of amazing Eagle Christians I know personally, having served in 48 different nations during my ministry. With each chapter paralleling the actual life stages of an eagle and the growth cycle of a Christian, you will learn how to fly in the company of God's faithful. This book was designed for use in personal inspiration and devotion as well small group studies.

I pray you will have as much joy reading about these "Majesties in Motion" as I have had in preaching a hundred sermons about them. Look up, spread your God-given wings, take to the skies and become the Eagle Christian God designed you to be!

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## FOREWORD

*“It is a superb and fascinating creature,  
this great-winged raptorial...  
with wings outstretched it may cover  
a spread of more than seven feet  
from the one tip to the other,  
and in flight it affords a spectacle of  
incomparable wild beauty –  
soaring over the land and water  
it has gazed upon from its nest.”*

–ALAN DEVOE

Eagles fascinate me. Early in my ministry I wrote a gospel tract merging mesmerizing facts about eagles with the many scriptural references regarding them, and received enthusiastic response from my readers. For years, my daughter Angela, has encouraged me to write a book comparing the way of the eagles to the Christian’s spiritual walk and sharing my own personal journey. At last, I took her advice.

Angela and I met with trusted friends and veteran writers, Jackina Stark and Victor Knowles. I presented my first rough draft and waited a few weeks for their feedback. Their “constructive criticism” was a bit more than I anticipated.

When next we met, Jackina, a retired college English professor of 26 years, presented an eleven-page critique. She exclaimed, “And Joe, this is just the *tip* of the iceberg – the outermost tip!”

Victor, understanding my fragile male ego, cautiously agreed with her, but peppered with praise certain things he *did* like; and my daughter Angela, *claimed* she had to leave the meeting early and slithered out with no comment. I phoned her after the meeting, hoping to hear an encouraging word. I received the truth instead.

“Dad, I told you to write a book about your life experiences. Readers will be

interested in learning about the people you've met and the places you've been. You've traveled around the world several times, and preached the gospel in 48 countries. Your life *is* a book, Dad. Write it! Don't be afraid to tell about the mountaintops *and* the valleys, the joys *and* the tears. I hope I'm not being too harsh, Dad, but ... really, that's what Christ is all about."

Angela was right. People need to hear about my personal relationship with a living God - the One who has been so good to lead me into ministry opportunities that no one else on earth has ever experienced. On so many occasions, He has rescued me from danger and evil, while at the same time giving me fruit for my labor.

I have always been a rather private person living a very public life. My life-long pattern of not broadcasting the miraculous experiences and rescues in my life prevented me from writing this book until Angela reminded me that "personal" is what Christ is all about - personal to me, personal to the people in my stories, and personal to those who will read *SOAR - THE WAY OF THE EAGLES*.

Our God is a personal God, He always has been. Wanting us to understand all He has to show us, He speaks to us in metaphors we can understand. Many times God uses the animal kingdom to speak to us in terms we can comprehend. We identify with the boldness of a lion (Hosea 11), the cleverness of a wolf (John 10), and the craftiness of a fox (Luke 13). We are familiar with the meekness of a lamb (Psalm 23), the peace of a dove (Matthew 3), the power of a bear (Amos 5), and the speed of a leopard (Hosea 13). God has placed within the animal kingdom alone everything necessary to understand His characteristics and nature. God uses the natural to explain the supernatural. But in no way is He more dramatically symbolized than in the way of the eagle.

There are some 60 varieties of eagles in the world. The armies of Rome marched under the emblem of an eagle. The American bald eagle appears on the Great Seal of the United States as well as on the back of the dollar bill. Many countries have the image of an eagle interwoven into their national flags, displayed on their military medals and police badges, or vividly embossed on their official letterhead. Truly, it is the eagle that is recognized around the earth as a symbol of authority, freedom and strength. Most importantly, even God's holy and inspired writings liken God Himself and His followers to the mighty eagle. In fact, the eagle is mentioned 37 times in the Bible.

The first reference is in Exodus 19:4, where God describes how He bore Israel "on eagles' wings" out of Egypt. How like our Lord. He desires to use the same method of operation in our deliverance and salvation. He longs to swoop into our lives and shelter us under His mighty wings. Often, He uses earthbound dwellers with eagle eyes and hearts to accomplish His purpose.

God desires to communicate and relate something "personal" with us. What a soaring concept!





## Chapter 1

# ON MIGHTY WINGS

*“Stand strong when adversity hits,  
for when storm clouds come, eagles soar.”*

**-ANONYMOUS**

*Rain is pelting down in torrents and the wind howls as thunderclouds roll ominously out of the western sky. The mother eagle is pounded with marble-sized hail while she spreads her wings like an umbrella over her eaglets. It is the worst storm of the summer. She glances over at her mate, perched on an overhang of rock, his stately head uplifted, his eyes searching for a break in the clouds.*

*Long before the bad weather arrived, the chickens that lived in the barnyard far below had scurried about gathering insects, grubs or treasured kernels of corn – anything they could eat before taking refuge in the safety and shelter of the barn. The earthbound birds constantly fixed their eyes on the dust beneath their scaly toes. They had neither the ability nor the desire to look up and envision what could be. The chickens look down while the eagle looks up.*

*Suddenly, the eagle spies a shaft of light piercing the thunderclouds. With a shrill scream, he spreads his God-given wings and ascends through the beam to soar above the darkness and danger. He does not attempt to escape the raging gusts; he simply uses them to lift himself higher, rising on the very winds that brought the hail and downpour. This is where he reigns – a place few dream of going.*

I asked Linda to marry me after knowing her for only seven days. I was 23, and preaching a revival in Nebraska at the time. She was a student at Lincoln General School of Nursing, and attending the revival with a friend of hers. When I saw her, I knew I had to get to know her better. Impulsively, I jumped at the chance to give her a ride when I learned she was headed home for Christmas break. Surprisingly, she accepted, though her perplexed expression gave away her suspicions. I realized

later that she probably had great doubts as to the veracity of my statement when I declared I was “headed that way.”

I laugh now that I’m familiar with her off-the-beaten-path hometown of Winnetoon, NE. Nobody just “heads that way”! But the next day, we were Winnetoon-bound. She grew up on a farm, a surprise to anyone who knows her well, prim as she seems now. Back then, Linda could milk a cow better and walk a row of beans faster than most farmhands! As fate would have it, a blizzard blew in, trapping me on that farm with her parents and five siblings.

I would come to love these people, but at that time, all I knew was that I already loved her. She was so beautiful! I surprised us both by kissing her for the first time in the hog barn, the only place we found to get away from the seven other people who inhabited that little farmhouse. She surprised me seven days later when she said “yes” to my marriage proposal. I have never once been sorry! The day after I married her, I took this farm girl (who had never been farther south than Douglas, NE) to South Korea, where we “mission sat” for John J. Hill while he furloughed in the states. Now deceased, John was a twenty-eight year veteran missionary to Korea at the time, and one of my most trusted friends and mentors.

I delighted in working with the Korean churches, orphanages and Bible colleges. To be quite honest, if I had two lives to live, I would still like to spend one of them with the wonderful Christians of South Korea. That is just how much I respect the Korean people and how much I remember their love for Linda and me.

I have often heard that “ministry begets ministry.” I experienced it first-hand the day that Army Chaplain Gary Hill came to our mission compound. He told us he had four U.S. military men incarcerated in a nearby Korean prison, but was unable to visit them on a regular basis because he was stationed too far away. He had taken them some English Bibles, but what they really needed was someone to conduct a weekly Bible study with them. He asked me if I could make myself available for them once a week.

After he left, Linda had to give me an attitude adjustment because my initial reaction wasn’t very good. I never envisioned myself a “prison” evangelist or had the slightest desire to work with the incarcerated. I remember lying awake at night, literally sweating, and thinking, *“There are not that many mission compounds in Taejon. Linda and I will be easy to find. What if these guys get out and come to visit us? These are complete strangers. I don’t know what they have done. I will be putting Linda in harm’s way.”* Satan was working overtime to persuade me to walk away from this mission opportunity.

The next morning I told Linda, “O.K., I will do this, but only as a favor to Chaplain Hill. One visit and that’s it. I’m not going back.”

Linda, who has always been spiritually stronger than me, smiled and said, “Good. You’ll see. Everything will be all right. You might even like it.”

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I found myself thrust into an environment I never dreamed I would enter – a human warehouse full of damp, dark, dilapidated cells. In the States I had driven past hundreds of jails, correctional facilities and detention centers, but seldom had I entered one of them. The few times I had, they were nothing like this. Halfway around the world, God showed me the plans He had for my life – plans that would transform my outlook on ministry and determine my destiny.

Later, I learned that in this particular prison, a visit from clergy and lawyers provided the only time allowed outside their cells for many of these prisoners. They were not even permitted to speak to one another while outside their cells. They were desperate, lonely, and truly “a captive audience.” By month’s end I was conducting chapel services for the Korean, as well as the American, prisoners and these numbered in the hundreds at each assembly.

From this humble beginning evolved what would soon become a nation-wide jail and prison ministry that took me into every nook and cranny of South Korea. Kim He Young became my faithful companion and gifted interpreter. Thousands of prisoners, male and female, young and old, heard the gospel and had the opportunity to receive Christ. And many did! I have come to appreciate captive audiences over the years and marveled at how the gospel message affects them. Paul and Silas had their captive audience in Acts 16: 25-34. I’m sure entering prison wasn’t high on their agenda either, but God had different ideas for them as well. Their captive audience turned into a mission field. I experienced the same in hundreds of correctional facilities around the world.

Linda was right. I liked it. In fact, I became addicted to prison ministry. Like that chicken with its head to the ground, I had been pecking away at a life I had laid out for myself. But God wanted more and in His infinite wisdom, knew I was capable of doing more. He wanted me to soar with Him through the storms and unsure weather, and learn to truly listen to Him. He wants the same for you – to hear His voice, look up from your pecking – and soar.

An eagle does not fear storms and is not deterred by looming obstacles. In the same way, God is not intimidated by the violent assaults that attempt to squander His plan and purpose for our lives. He will provide a way for us, not by leaving us to our own human reasoning or limited understanding, but by lifting us up ... on His wings.

The difference between Christianity and all the religions of this world is that religion is man striving to reach up to God, whereas Christianity is God coming down to man in the person of His only Son, Jesus Christ. Just think, He who created the world and all therein, and all that is beyond, is watching with intense affection and concern over you at this very moment. Whatever detours you may have taken in life or roadblocks you may have erected; however lost you may believe you are; wherever you may be in the storm; He is watching over you with tender loving care

even as you read these words. Sometimes God calms the storm, and other times He calms His child and allows the storm to rage.

I had a good friend and loyal supporter who, at one time, thrashed about in a self-inflicted storm. He lived in the gutter -- sometimes literally. His name would have been at the bottom of any preacher's list as a likely prospect for salvation. His community called him "the town drunk." When his son pleaded with him to go to a church revival, Lyle replied, "There's no way. No way!"

Finally, he consented to go for just one night, in a half-hearted attempt to appease the boy, and believing it was one small way in which he could make something up to his son. What he didn't realize was that his reason for being there that night had far less to do with *his* son and everything to do with his Heavenly Father's Son. Lyle later said, "It seemed as if the preacher didn't preach to anybody but me. It was as if he was telling my life story. He made it pretty clear that without Christ, I was not *going* to Hell, Hell was *coming* to me!"

Lyle held tight to the seat in front of him to keep from going forward at the invitation. He sensed the storm around him, but didn't realize God would not force him to do something against his will. He thought God was going to reach out and get him right there on the spot! Lyle didn't understand that he had to be willing. He'd always thought that he and God had a special deal. He could believe there was a God, but he could take or leave the Jesus part. Lyle soon learned that Jesus and God are One, and that there is no way to have a meaningful relationship with God while ignoring Christ! Lyle toughed it out that night. When the preacher approached him after the service, he asked Lyle, "Have you ever thought about becoming a Christian?"

"Yes," Lyle said, "I've thought about it, but frankly, I've gone too far to turn back now. There's no hope for me."

"I knew a man like you once," the preacher replied. "He also came to one of my revivals. It took a lot to get him through the door too. The power of God was so strong on his life that night that it scared him and he never came back. I wonder if you'll be back tomorrow night."

The look in that preacher's eye challenged Lyle. He refused to be bested! Lyle had a lot of nerve and even more pride. He decided before leaving that night that the preacher was not going to talk about him like he'd just talked about that other guy! Come hell or high water he would be there the next night! He wrestled with God once; he could do it again.

The next night Lyle stared at the floor during the invitation. For one brief second he looked up, and when he did, the conviction of sin and a love for God flooded his soul. Lyle went to the front of the church and fell on his knees, but this time he was not "*drunk with wine*," he was "*filled with the Spirit*" (Ephesians 5:18). He prayed, "God, you have to break my stubbornness and make the tears come. I want the real thing. I've seen too much 'put-on' and 'show-off' from churchgoers. I want

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to be a contender, not a pretender. I will go where you want me to go and stay where you want me to stay.”

Lyle later recalled, “It was as if I was standing in a dark garage and someone opened the garage door and let in the light! It was all a blur after that. I only remember taking one step. God took all the rest of them for me.”

God did make the tears come and the repentance flow. If He can do it for Lyle Ogle, there is no one He cannot reach. Lyle lived the rest of his life in a loving relationship with Christ. Once he told me, “God has no grandchildren. I am a child of a King who knows each one of His children by name! There isn’t enough money in America for me to give up what I now have in Him. I never want to live another day without Jesus. I tried life without Him . . . it just didn’t work.”

Lyle’s life had been one raging storm after another until Jesus, the Maker of the Universe (John 1:3), stepped in and said, “Peace, be still!” Lyle still faced struggles in his life, but never again did he face them alone. While the storms raged on, he safely abided under the mighty wings of God.

The storm the eagle flies through is a literal one, penetrated by flashes of lightning and booms of thunder; marked by pelting rain against his feathered face. The storms we pass through here on this earth are no less literal: the tragedy we weren’t expecting, the job we thought we’d have forever, the marriage that was supposed to last, children we were sure we’d raised right who walk away from God for a season. All of these are unexpected booms and flashes. The constant day-to-day struggles in our relationships and finances represent the pelting rain and are a constant part of the storm. They might seem less shocking than the flashes and booms produced by boiling thunderheads, but they can be just as draining. These are the storms the Lord promised to help us endure. He assured us they would exist. *“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world”* (John 16:33).

When famed missionary David Livingstone accepted the honorary doctor of law degree at Glasgow University, he was received with silent respect. His face and body were alarmingly thin from sixteen years of exposure to Africa’s hardships. One arm hung useless at his side as a result of a lion attack.

Livingstone asked, “Shall I tell you what supported me through all those years among a people whose language I could not understand and whose attitude toward me was often uncertain and occasionally hostile? It was this promise of Christ: ‘*... lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age*’” (Matthew 28:20).

The storm might rage, but He is with us through it all.

The eagle is the only bird known to man that will fly directly into a thunderstorm. Perhaps their boldness has something to do with the fact that the bald eagle can fly to an altitude of 10,000 feet. During level flight, they can achieve speeds of up to 35 mph. A mature eagle can dive at 100 miles per hour and can spread his

wings and position his tail with such stunning skill that he can come to a dead stop in mid-air in the space of about 20 feet. Jet airplanes have even been known to hit eagles that were flying above the thunderclouds. Other birds skirmish to get away from storms, seeking refuge and shelter in the safety of a barn or in their nest. Not so with the mighty eagle, who actually seems at peace in the midst of the tempest.

God does not permit storms in our life for the purpose of defeating us, but in order to strengthen us. For “smooth seas do not a good sailor make.” The more we persevere, the stronger our faith. How we handle the storms of life builds and reflects our character. If turbulent winds enable the eagle to fly faster, leaving behind all distractions and reaching greater heights, how much more we should trust in God’s mighty wings to carry us through every storm?

I am hard pressed to think of one Biblical hero who had a smooth road in front of him in achieving “hero” status in our churches today. What focal point of a Sunday school lesson overcame no hardships, encountered no storms or obstacles and had to exhibit no faith or trust in the One who can calm the storm? Where would the lesson be? There is beauty in the storm. There is grace in the struggle to fly against it. Don’t hide your tears and your wind-buffed feathers in shame. Don’t drop your face because the hail has left scars others can see. You are an eagle. This storm is but temporary and is making you strong. You belong above it...and there is no way but through.



## Chapter 2

# UNDER HIS WINGS

*“Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me!  
For my soul trusts in You;  
And in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge,  
until these calamities have passed by.”*

**-PSALM 57:1**

*As the fearless and regal creature penetrates the clouds in torpedo fashion, his speed and strength still cannot outrun the rain. As he flies into the storm, his waterproof tail feathers serve as a rudder to help him stabilize flight and avoid a fatal tailspin. To shake off the weighty drops of moisture, he ruffles the inner and outer layers of interlocking microscopic structures that are light, but extremely strong. Higher and higher he goes, spreading his six-foot span of winged shelter to tolerate the higher elevations where wet becomes cold. With his skin covered by downy tufts made to trap air and insulate him against the freezing torrents, the powerful eagle soars confidently under his perfect wings.*

So what happens once I've flown above the storm like an eagle? Nobody else flies up there, that's been made clear. The eagle is unlike other birds and flies alone above the storm. Have I now set myself up to walk alone?

I remember clearly a time when I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that I was being sheltered under His great and mighty wing. I had preached a 12 hour See-Through-the-Scriptures seminar in an Alaskan prison over four days. There was one man who stood out among the others. He asked intelligent questions and seemed to truly thirst for knowledge of God and the scriptures. As the seminar ended on a Friday afternoon, the man approached me and said that he had many more questions he wanted to ask. He asked if it would be possible to meet with me individually to receive more instruction. I was so encouraged!

I immediately made arrangements with the prison to meet with him. They set up a meeting for us in one of the lawyer rooms. It was about twice the size of a phone booth and consisted only of a table and two chairs. There was a door that was always locked behind the lawyer as he entered and a small window type slit in that door so a guard could keep an eye on things. If you wanted out, you had to knock on the door and be permitted to exit.

I met the guard on duty at the end of the hall and he escorted me back to the room where I was to meet the prisoner who was already there, waiting for me. I took my seat opposite him, with my back to the door, as he had already sat in the other chair. I noticed that both his hands were fisted on the table and that, in one of them, he held a newly sharpened pencil. He appeared tense and different than he had been during the sessions.

I expected questions, but instead he said to me, "I have had a vision from God. God has told me that I can either stab you in the neck with this pencil and go free immediately; or I can refrain from stabbing you and will then die of a stabbing myself within the next few days."

I was stunned! He said this with absolutely no expression on his face and continued to stare at me as though he were truly seeking my input. I felt my heart begin to race and my mind scramble for how I might escape in time or get the guard's attention. Suddenly, something I had read in the past couple of days was brought to my mind. "Fear is the absence of faith." I don't even know where I had read it, but it was given to me for that moment. In that instant, peace washed over me.

I began to tell him I had come all the way to Alaska to speak with him and the other prisoners about Christ and that he was important to God. I shared with him the fact that many other prisons were already lined up waiting to hear the seminar, just as he had; and that if he took my life, those prisoners would never get to hear what he had heard over the last four days. I also shared with him that I had a wife and two young daughters who were counting on me and would suffer terribly without me. I ended by gently laying my hands over his and asking him if I could pray with him. He said that would be fine. I bowed my head and closed my eyes, my hands on his hands the only way of knowing if he was making a move or not.

I prayed for probably five or six minutes and when there was nothing left to say, I said, "Amen." He parroted my "Amen" and I opened my eyes to find him staring at me blankly. He truly was insane. I stood up slowly, pushed my chair back, turned my back on him and walked calmly to the door. It opened in my hand. I closed it behind me and looked back at him through the small glass slit. He was still staring at me with cold, dead eyes.

I went to the end of the hallway to tell the guards about what had happened and they were surprised to see me. They said that while I was in the room, the shift had changed and the guard who had been there before them said nothing to them about



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me being back there. They'd had no idea. But God did. He was with me in that room. I was under His protective wing.

Read the words of the Psalmist who knew what it was like to rise above the storms of life on the wings of God so that he might fly like an eagle. He thanked God that when he became weary, he was taken back to the nest, under the shelter and warmth of the same wings that had sustained him through the storm. He began as a shepherd boy who sang to sheep. He ended up a king. That same David understood that peace rules the day when God rules the heart. For God alone sees the heart and He spreads His mighty wings over those hearts that beat for Him.

- *“Because You have been my help, therefore in the shadow of Your wings I will rejoice”* (Psalm 63:7).
- *“He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge; His truth shall be your shield and buckler”* (Psalm 91:4).
- *“I will abide in Your tabernacle forever; I will trust in the shelter of Your wings”* (Psalm 61:4).
- *“How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings”* (Psalm 36:7).
- *“Bless the Lord, O my soul; Who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s”* (Psalm 103:5).

Generations before the writings of David, Boaz said to Ruth in one of the greatest love stories ever told, *“The Lord repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge”* (Ruth 2:12).

I must confess that Ruth is my favorite book in the entire Old Testament. It is a story of romance and redemption - that of a Jewish man's love for a Gentile woman, and foreshadows Christ's love for the church. This brief, but powerful account is the story of a woman who stepped out of a curse and into a blessing; out of the storm and under His wing.

It begins with a lady named Naomi and her husband, Elimelech. They lived in *Judah*, the “place of blessing,” with their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion. East of Judah and on the other side of the Jordan River lay the land of Moab, a cursed place, designated for the condemned Moabites who refused to allow Israel free passage through Moab on their way to Canaan.

During a severe famine, Elimelech moved his family from Judah, the place of blessing, into Moab, the cursed place. There they found only idolatry and paganism for they had abandoned their sanctified residence under God's provision and care. In physical or spiritual famine, it is a great risk to walk away from the Lord. Often a high price is paid away from God's protective wings. For Elimelech, leaving the

blessed place and embracing the cursed place ended in death.

After Elimilech died, the family structure began to fall apart. Both sons married Moabite girls, Orpah and Ruth. Then both sons died, leaving Naomi alone with two Moabite daughters-in-law. Naomi felt that Moab had indeed been a cursed place for her and determined to return to Judah. Both girls wept and said, “*Surely we will return with you to your people*” (Ruth 1:10).

However, Orpah, who was a worshipper of the abominable gods of Moab, decided not to cross over into Judah, but returned to her people among the hills of Moab. Orpah turned away from the shelter of God and into the scourge of a Moabite god named Chemosh, when she made a U-turn at the river Jordan. Her decision enslaved her to an overshadowing plague of idolatry when she could have chosen to abide under Naomi’s God and His protective wings. A search of the Bible from one cover to the other will never again find mention of her name.

In prison ministry we deal a lot with people who are living under a curse. Make no mistake, their choices have been their own, yet they are living out a curse. Sadly, in many cases, they are also passing that very same poison down to their own children. Like Orpah, they choose to remain in and consistently return to, the “cursed place.”

The pattern of sexual abuse is one dark example of a handed-down curse. Common logic mandates that the very last thing on planet earth a sexually abused child would want to do, once they become an adult, is physically or sexually abuse another. Why would they want to put someone else through what they have struggled with for years? Yet, the majority of physical or sexual abusers were physically or sexually abused themselves. This does not mean that the majority of children who were abused will abuse their own children. 30% of abused children will grow up to abuse their own children. But statistics show that close to 95% of abusers were abused themselves. (statistics from the short film “ReMoved”, 2015). It is a cancer, and it is being spread from one generation to another until somebody breaks the cycle.

On many occasions, we have temptations like Orpah, to return to the curse. Millions choose to live in the shadows of darkness instead of under the shadow of God’s downy, but mighty wings.

While ministering at a little country church in Missouri, I met a fifteen-year-old girl who had been physically and verbally abused all her life. She lived for only one thing – to turn eighteen so she could leave home and be free from her parents.

One Sunday, a couple of her Christian neighbors brought her and her seven-year-old niece to church. I don’t know what the seven-year-old did, but suddenly the girl stood up, grabbed her niece by the nape of her neck, took her outside, and began slapping her and calling her names. It was summertime and the church windows were open. The sounds of painful abuse blew through the open panes like harsh, hot winds. She might someday turn eighteen and walk away from her situation at home, but without intervention, she would take the curse with her.

## Under His Wings

Sometimes the curse can be as subtle as a negative attitude. Frequently, it's temper. Every now and again certain individuals can literally see red, doing and saying things they don't even remember later. From where does such pessimism and bitterness come? Why such rage? Look back in the family line and one can usually identify the source. Alcoholism, addiction, financial irresponsibility, laziness, racism, etc., you fill in the blank. They are all curses, handed down... to hand down to others.

That was the culture in which Orpah and Ruth lived. They were cursed women living among a cursed people, serving a cursed god in a cursed land. Yet Orpah stubbornly said, "I am going back to it."

Ruth, however, sought the one, true, living and loving God. She crossed over the Jordan into the place of blessing because she longed for His holiness, kindness and purity. No turning back for her! She desired the fellowship of the redeemed. Ruth said to Naomi, "*Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me.*" (Ruth 1:16-17)

When Ruth turned her face toward God and her back to Moab, she broke the curse and found refuge in the Lord. On His wings He would carry her. Under His wings, He would guard her. And there would be no foreign god with her. Jehovah Jirah, the Provider, would bring her to Himself and lead her into a safe and certain future.

In jails and prisons all around the world, safe and certain futures are often intercepted when governments spend billions of dollars on medications for mental health, but forget to diagnose the spirit. In some cases the medicine is needed. But far too often, counselors step out of the cells saying, "She's unreachable." "He's untouchable." "There's no hope!" Under these circumstances and without God's vision, they attempt to treat the mind, when it is the soul that is sick. They dismiss souls as "hopeless," but the power of God can enter those same lives, and break the curses upon their hearts.

In chapter 9 of the Book of Acts, a young girl named Tabitha lay dying. The doctor walked out of her room and announced to her friends, "We have done all we can do. She is dead." When that physician left the house, the extent of man's knowledge and skill departed with him. Then, into the room stepped Peter, a man of God. He did not have the expertise of a doctor. In fact, he had no medical degree at all. But he did have the power of God living in him. Tabitha arose!

When the world says, "It's hopeless," God steps in and says, "Allow me."

We, the Church, are offering the prison system the finest type of rehabilitation possible, that which comes from a transformed life through Jesus Christ. We back away from no one about this. Historically documented success stories like that of Ruth

and Tabitha are powerful evidence of God's transforming power and a message to these prisoners that no one is beyond God's reach. The numbers of prisoners who are added daily to the roll of the redeemed continue to confirm that God is still at work.

Yet, an important aspect remains. The blessing may be offered, but the gift must be received. God cared about Orpah. She refused Him. He turned her over to her gods and her story is lost to us. God cared for Ruth. She chose Him. He redeemed her and her story lives on as an example of a curse broken.

Like Father like Son, Jesus reaches out to change lives too. He has never catered to the trends of custom or convention, but to the heart of God. Remember the time he sat down and personally ministered to a woman, scorned and outcast when she came to draw water from a well (John 4)? In a culture where women could not even testify in a Jewish court, Jesus chose her to testify of Him.

In Old Testament times, God so highly regarded women who had no visible means of support, that He provided a social welfare program for them. He instructed the congregation of the children of Israel, saying, *"When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. And you shall not glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather every grape of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am the Lord your God"* (Leviticus 19: 9, 10).

*"When you reap your harvest in your field, and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over the boughs again; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow"* (Deuteronomy 24:19, 20).

God also instituted a procedure called "the kinsman redeemer." *"If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the widow of the dead man shall not be married to a stranger outside the family; her husband's brother shall go in to her, take her as his wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. And it shall be that the firstborn son which she bears will succeed to the name of his dead brother; that his name may not be blotted out of Israel"* (Deuteronomy 25:5, 6).

In this ancient society, God provided for women who, on their own, had very little sustenance. Don't miss the application to our lives, men and women alike. Are we not dependent upon Him for every blessing in our lives? Are we not dependent upon Him for our redemption? It is good to know that God makes provision for us by carrying us on His wings through the storms of life, or in Ruth's case to the other side of the Jordan. And God doesn't just rescue us and then drop us saying, "Well, I got you this far, you'll have to figure out the rest on your own." *"For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you'"* (Hebrews 13:5).

Upon returning to Bethlehem in Judah, Ruth went to "glean heads of grain" in the field of Boaz who was a relative of her deceased husband and who stood in

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line to redeem Ruth. *“Then Boaz said to Ruth, ‘You will listen, my daughter, will you not? Do not go to glean in another field, nor go from here, but stay close by my young women. It has been fully reported to me, all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband, and how you have left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and have come to a people whom you did not know before.’”* (Ruth 2:8, 11).

When Naomi learned that Ruth had found favor in the sight of Boaz, she said, *“Therefore wash yourself and anoint yourself, put on your best garment and go down to the threshing floor”* (Ruth 3:3). In other words: Get up, get dressed and go to where he is! When Boaz saw her, he spread his robe over her signifying that he would be her covering. She would be under his protection.

But there were certain qualifications Boaz had to meet in order to redeem Ruth. While he may have been willing to accept her, she was not simply his for the taking. In order to be a kinsman redeemer:

- **You had to be blood related to the dead husband.** You couldn’t just be a friend of the family.
- **You had to be a free man.** You could not be a prisoner or one who had been sold into slavery.
- **You had to be able to afford her.** Maybe you wanted her, but financially you could not afford to provide for her.
- **You had to be willing to accept her.** You could pass her on to the next relative in line.

Unfortunately for Boaz, there was one before him in line for Ruth. Boaz sent Ruth home to her mother-in-law with a gift of barley in hand and told her he would speak to the man. Naomi put it more bluntly to Ruth when she said, *“Sit still, my daughter, until you know how the matter will turn out; for the man will not rest until he has concluded the matter this day”* (Ruth 3:18). In other words, “Relax, and trust God! Boaz wants this to happen and will make it happen today!” And Boaz was true to his word.

*“Now Boaz went up to the gate and sat down there; and behold, the close relative of whom Boaz had spoken came by. So Boaz said, ‘Come aside, friend, sit down here.’ So he came aside and sat down. And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, ‘Sit down here.’ So they sat down. Then he said to the close relative, ‘Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, sold the piece of land which belonged to our brother Elimelech. And I thought to inform you, saying, ‘Buy it back in the presence of the inhabitants and the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, redeem it; but if you will not redeem it, then tell me, that I may know;*

*for there is no one but you to redeem it, and I am next after you.'*

*"And he said, 'I will redeem it'.*

*"Then Boaz said, 'On the day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you must also buy it from Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to perpetuate the name of the dead through his inheritance.'*

*"And the close relative said, 'I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I ruin my own inheritance. You redeem my right of redemption for yourself, for I cannot redeem it.'*

*"Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging, to confirm anything, one man took off his sandal and gave it to the other; and this was a confirmation in Israel.*

*"Therefore the close relative said to Boaz, 'Buy it for yourself.' So he took off his sandal" (Ruth 4:1-8).*

Here's how the rest of the story goes: Boaz married Ruth and they had a son named Obed. Obed became the father of Jesse, and Jesse became the father of King David. And it was through the line of David that Jesus Christ was born.

It all started with a life-changing decision made in Moab. At one time Ruth was living under a curse, but when she turned to the Lord, began walking in His ways and serving Him wholeheartedly, He gave her a priceless reward by placing her in the ancestral line of Christ Himself.

Surrendering everything enabled Ruth to be lifted above the storms that were raging around her. When we surrender all to Jesus, He is able to take us further than we could or would ever have dreamed of going. Jesus said in John 10:10, *"I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."* God's plans are individually designed and suited for each one of us. He provided an excellent kinsman redeemer for Ruth, and He has provided the perfect Kinsman Redeemer for you and me.

- **Is He blood related to us? YES!** This is why He had to become flesh and dwell among us. Throughout His earthly ministry, people referred to Him as *"Son of God"* (Matthew 27:40). But Jesus addressed Himself as *"Son of Man"* (Matthew 8:20). He was emphasizing that He had become flesh of our flesh so He could be blood related to us.
- **Is He a free man? YES!** *"For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin"* (Hebrews 4:15).
- **Is He able to redeem us? YES!** In fact, He is the only one that is able to do so. *"And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him"* (Hebrews 5:9). He slept in a foreign land at the close of every day, yet was obedient to the Father of His homeland. Because of Christ, God is able to forget your sins (Hebrews 8:12).

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- **Is He willing to receive us? YES!** *“This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief”* (1 Timothy 1:15). Christ’s blood did not just cover our sins, it absorbed them. Jesus *is* our Kinsman Redeemer!

Intimacy with our Redeemer is crucial for the Christian’s outward vision and spiritual insight. Through faith in His great mercy and under the shelter of His wings, you will find yourself more productive in accomplishing the work God has called you to do. Remember Psalm 46:1, *“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.”* Therefore, *“In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths”* (Proverbs 3:6).

I know well how He took me a different direction and gave wings to a ministry I never anticipated. Stay under His wings and you’ll discover just what He has in store for you too.







## Chapter 3

# STIRRING UP THE NEST

*“The mother eagle teaches her little ones to fly  
By making their nest so uncomfortable  
That they are forced to leave it  
And commit themselves to the unknown world of air outside  
And just does our God to us.”*

**-HANNAH WHITALL SMITH**

*Of all the birds that fill our skies, eaglets are the hardest to teach to fly. The first step from his nest plummets an eaglet hundreds of feet into nothingness. So the eaglet instinctively clings to his aerie, built high upon the mountains. Other eaglets watch from the towering heights of swaying pines in aeries perched in the tallest of branches. All are safe inside their sturdy, spacious homes.*

*If a fledgling robin or sparrow falls to the ground, perhaps some safe, warm, comfortable leaves will soften the impact. Not so for the eaglet.*

*As the eaglet looks over the side of his nest, he usually sees nothing but craggy rocks waiting for him below. He knows it will mean instant death if he fails. Though he sees the danger, he is not aware of all the grand and glorious things that await him. This nest is his sanctuary, a place of familiarity. Unless forced from it, chances are he'd never leave of his own accord. So mother eagle has to take charge of teaching him to fly and the learning process will be painful at times, often leaving the eaglet confused and discouraged.*

*One of the first things a mother eagle does to get flying on the minds of her brood is to “stir up the nest.” She begins by walking around inside of the nest, breaking twigs and turning over leaves. The nest, which had once been the eaglet's comfort zone, becomes no longer so pleasant. Bitter mountain winds blow through the holes in the nest, chilling his body and ruffling his feathers. Sticks poke at his sides.*

*Home is not the comfy, cozy place it once was. But when the teaching is complete and he dares to take flight, he will soar with the brave ones who each took their own leap of faith.*

Sometimes, a mother eagle has to literally tear up the nest to force her babe to leave it, and occasionally this is exactly how God must deal with us. God has to stir up our security to get us to launch out and become the mature Eagle Christians he wants us to be. He wants us to catch the vision of what is really important and valuable in life. He wants us to fly.

Remember that any comfort zone can be a kind of nest, even the comfort zone of a ministry you know. In 2002, I was thrust into just such a situation where I was ill prepared to know what to do, but God knew – I just had to go along with Him.

I was in Cambodia doing a leadership conference in Battambang. Leaders from surrounding villages would travel into the city for the conference and then take what they had learned back to their villages. We met in a local church and one night during my teaching time, some men came in through the back of the church. Disruption ensued and it became clear that something major was going on. I had lost all control of the room and turned to my interpreter who was embroiled in heated conversation with the men who had entered the building.

He turned to me and told me something I will never forget. “Brother Joe, these men want a young girl who is a new convert to Christianity and our church. Her parents have sold her to them and told them they could pick her up here at the church.”

Sold her to them? How could this be? This was before human trafficking was a trendy topic in mainstream media and I had no idea such things were happening with alarming regularity in Cambodia and around the world. The men told those gathered that they had paid \$200 and would not be leaving until they had their merchandise. These impoverished men who had sacrificed so much already to be at this conference, began to dig in their pockets and bring out what little money they had. They were trying to pay her debt. I was able to finish paying the men and sent them on their way. I know now that paying a trafficker simply gives him the money to go buy another girl, but I can say unapologetically and with confidence that we did what we had to do and that, had you been there with me, you would have done the same. The young girl sat weeping in the corner of the church, grateful for her reprieve and humbled by their sacrifice.

I came home and challenged my oldest daughter, Stephanie, to begin researching the issue of child trafficking and slavery in Cambodia. In 2003, she went on a fact finding mission and Rapha House was born. At this time, Rapha House has 5 safe-houses throughout South East Asia and in Haiti. God will put just the right conditions together to stir your nest and drive you toward His will. Whether or not you go will be your choice.

God doesn't want to leave us in our filthy, ignorant position of nest dwelling.

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Therefore, He will use absolutely anything He sees fit to get our attention. This is what is meant in Isaiah 61:3 when He promised to give, *“beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.”* In this passage we catch a unique glimpse into the very heart of God.

I have met so many men and women who, after finding Christ in prison, have said to me, “I thank God I came to prison. Had I not come to prison I would be dead and in Hell right now.” What they are really saying is that God had to “stir up their nest” that they had built on the streets and in the back alleys, in order to get them to look up and step out.

He had to totally disrupt what they thought was their comfort zone – gangs, ungodly friends and dysfunctional family members. He had to stir the “leaves” and break the “twigs” – excuses they were hiding behind. And if He had to use a prison sentence to do it, then so be it. They would rather be in jail with Christ, than on the streets without Him.

What leaves and twigs can you identify in your own life that are preventing you from becoming an Eagle Christian? Allow God to shine the piercing light of His Holy Spirit into the darkest recesses of your heart and mind. Get rid of whatever He exposes and reveals in you that is not in accordance with Galatians 5: 22-26, *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.”*

We like to have nice things and plenty of them. Though there is nothing wrong with wanting or even possessing comfort and finery, it becomes a problem when possessions begin to interfere with our ability to soar like eagles. For some, this is their nest. Some nest dwellers have become far too comfortable in their downy self-centeredness, hiding behind leaves of narcissism because, “God wants me to be happy, right?” Others have bedded down behind twigs of anger and sarcasm, giving no thought to the effect that it is having on the hearts of their loved ones, or the heart of Christ. We all have nests (See Galatians 5: 19-21). And from God’s high and holy perch, they are all filthy and disgusting. He doesn’t want to see us living there – we are His children. He wants more for us so He begins to stir our nests. God wants to re-clothe us (Matthew 6:30), just as He did when Adam shamefully cowered behind his leaves.

Like the first man who hid in the garden, many years later a man would crouch among the tombs in a town called Gadara. The story is recorded in three of the four Gospels. Matthew 8, Mark 5, and Luke 8 tell the thrilling story of Legion, the “Terror of Gadara.” The account remains one of the greatest evidences of God’s love for a sick and dying world and those too accustomed to their messy nests.

Gadara was a beautiful seacoast community nestled against the Sea of Galilee. In the morning, farmers could be seen plowing their fields as children went about their chores. In the evening, the village would watch as fishermen returned home from a long day's outing at sea. Yet in all its beauty and grandeur, there was a cloud of apprehension that hung over Gadara, because people there never knew when Legion was coming to town.

He ran around naked, with his arms lacerated and his legs bleeding. At night they would hear his blood-curdling screams, the wailing of a wild man possessed. Their funeral processions to the graveyard, where Legion lived, would have to be hurried. Lookouts were posted to watch for Legion lest he come running out from behind a tombstone and harass mourners.

My beautiful, precious daughter, Angela, decided one day that she wanted to be the "Terror of Gadara." Allow me to explain. Our girls, Stephanie and Angela, attended a Christian grade school that encouraged their students to come to school once a year dressed as a Bible character or something relating to a Bible verse. One year, Angela boldly declared her choice - Legion. Linda was mortified at the thought! But Angela, undeterred, assured her mother that when it was her turn to stand in front of the whole school and quote her Bible verse, she would quote the part about God setting the "Terror of Gadara" free. "It's a great story," she insisted, with hope in her young voice.

In the end, Linda sent her daughters out the door that morning, one dressed like a princess of old and the other with ratted hair and torn clothing - smiles on both their faces. Linda had a firm expectation that she would be getting a phone call from the principal! But our daughter was right. It is a great story and was well received. It's a story about God looking down and seeing a putrid nest and sending his Son to destroy it. Legion was useless to his community, to his family, and to humanity until that day he met Jesus.

At first this story appears remote from our lives; we seem to have no part in it. But maybe it is more familiar than we like to admit. The story touches our lives because Legion has lost control of himself, is an offense to all his neighbors, is miserably restless and unhappy, and is the prey of morbid delusions and evil passions.

The records of modern medical psychology could produce many cases such as his, milder perhaps, yet to a certain extent parallel, in which a personality is distracted and torn due to the warring elements within its own tortured soul. Even those whole of mind are subject to battling elements of the flesh and the spirit that can drive them to make insane choices. We're not so far removed, really.

After more than four decades of working with prisoners with such tortured souls and getting to know their families, I believe I can predict something else that may have happened each evening in Gadara, because it still happens today. A wife prayed: "Lord, send someone to my husband. The whole community thinks he's

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crazy, but I love him. I know him. I believe You, Lord, can make the difference in his life. Please send someone to my husband.” Today, wives pray for their husbands who are locked away in graveyards called prisons. Others pray for husbands, though they live in physical freedom, which have created their own graveyards of anger, carnality or materialism.

I can also imagine little children in Gadara who knelt beside their beds and pleaded, “Oh, Lord, please send somebody to talk to my daddy.” Even tonight, all around the world, millions of children utter that same prayer. I met one of them in my home church in Racine, MO.

She was a precious little girl named Tiffany. Every Sunday in Children’s Church, she raised her hand to ask for prayer. Without fail, her request was always the same: “Please pray that my daddy will not be so mean.” Little did he know that every uncontrolled word he spoke in rage was being covered with a prayer. God heard every one of Tiffany’s petitions for her father, just as God heard the many pleas for Legion.

When Jesus set foot on the coast of Gadara, this wild man did not walk, rather the scriptures state he came “running” to meet Jesus. Darkness met light; ruin met redemption; sewage met sanctity; soot met snow. As he came running, he was also shouting, “*What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God*” (Mark 5:7)?

One can deny the existence of evil spirits and Satan. In so doing, he takes a dangerous and unrealistic view of the world. Satan and evil spirits are real. Jesus Himself declared that He came to overcome such as these. “*The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord*” (Luke 4:18, 19). In doing these things He fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 61:1-2.

A new day has dawned! “*To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace*” as Zechariah is quoted in Luke 1:79.

But when the light of Christ shines into the darkness, there are often sharp reactions. “*I implore You by God that You do not torment me,*” shouted the Gadarian demoniac at Jesus (Mark 5:7). For a being that habitually lives in darkness, the coming of light can be torture at first, rather than a blessing.

The coming of Jesus to this earth was the unavoidable collision of unhindered power manifested through a sinless life, with the power of evil through Satan’s opposition. It is impossible for the Son of God to be in the vicinity of evil and not challenge or expose it. Shadows of twilight and the curtain of night only temporarily hide what the brilliance of the noonday Son reveals.

As we draw nearer to Christ’s return, there is no indication of a lessening of

these powers of darkness. The idea that evil spirits only operate in “uncivilized” parts of the world is entirely illusory. It may be true that at some points in history, the church believed in both the existence of evil powers and the authority the Church possessed in Christ’s name to overcome them. Such a situation does not exist today. The Church has largely abdicated its authority and blandly disbelieves in such things, and consequently has been neutralized in much of its effectiveness.

In some cases, missionaries are being sent abroad into strongly held enemy territory unarmed, unprotected, and largely untrained for spiritual warfare. No wonder there is such a high casualty rate with so many missionaries returning depressed, disheartened or ill.

The situation at home is similar. Many Christian leaders and workers who began their ministry full of hope and zeal are now a shadow of the witnesses they once were. They have been gradually worn down by hard, monotonous and often fruitless work, not fully understanding the true nature of the battle, nor how to win against what often appear to be impossible odds. A modern general would be summarily dismissed if he dared to send unprepared soldiers into battle against such a merciless and skillful enemy.

The request of those demons as they were coming out of Legion is interesting, “*Send us to the swine, that we may enter them*” (Mark 5:12). Satan’s emissaries are just as comfortable living with a herd of swine as they are dwelling in your heart and in your life. Their first choice is you; but if you, through the power of our risen Lord will cast them out, they will be just as content to dwell in a horde of slobbering pigs.

The evil spirits that were within Legion came out of him and entered into the assemblage of swine. He was purified. He was sanctified. When Jesus does a job, He does a complete job. This man was not partially cleansed. He was completely cleansed. When we come to Jesus Christ for the remission of our sins, Jesus does not forgive just a few of our sins; Jesus forgives all of our sins. When Jesus frees us from addiction and the guilt and shame that attaches to us through sin, He completely frees us and wipes away our guilt and shame.

The demon-possessed herd rushed down the steep bank, and slowly drowned in the turbid waters. The herdsman ran into the city to tell the people what had happened. And oh, how the tongues began to wag! The more they talked, the less they spoke of Jesus. They instead spoke about their financial loss of 2,000 hogs.

Remember, entering the swine was not Jesus’ idea – it was Satan’s. Jesus did not cause the swine to die – Satan did. Jesus gets blamed for a lot of things that are not His fault. How many times do people become angry with Jesus because their loved one dies? Well, ask yourself, “Who brought death, sickness, and sin into this world?” Be careful not to blame Christ for Satan’s actions.

Conversely, we cannot blame Satan for the actions we choose to take. It is our responsibility to turn our ear and hearts away from the Enemy and toward Christ.

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Before Legion met Jesus, there was plenty of room in his heart for demons to thrive. After meeting Christ, there was no room left for darkness. Light filled him, chasing away every shred of shadow and spilling out of him until those around him could see the man, not his sin.

At last, the entire community came rushing out to meet Jesus. An unusual scene was waiting for them upon their arrival. Legion was sitting at the feet of Jesus. I suppose most of them had never seen him sitting down before. He had always been up – raging, ranting and running. He was now in control of himself, in his right mind, and quiet. Before, he would have been roaring blasphemies and shouting profanities. Now he was fully clothed – physically and spiritually. Jesus came to town and all things were made new (2 Cor. 5:17).

This is not a case for Christ’s power. To still the wind is easy for Him. To heal the sick is not difficult. To set a captive free? Piece of cake. God’s power, however, is not forced into the mortal realm or upon men’s souls. God will never cram His love down your throat. The Terror of Gadara desired to be healed and Christ obliged.

The people placed it all in the balances. They calculated their financial loss of 2,000 pigs against the healing of one man. *“Then they began to plead with Him to depart from their regio.”* (Mark 5:17). What they were truly saying is that they wanted the sausages of hogs, not the grace, mercy and peace of the Son of God. They wailed over the ruin of the pig market and whined that they couldn’t afford the loss. They were not concerned about goodness and holiness; they were concerned about their pigs.

Before we judge the Gadarian community too quickly, keep in mind there are some that are concerned with far less than just a pig. As a young man, I used to pick up some children on my way to church, whose parents refused to bring them. One morning, I had an elderly lady of the church riding with me when I stopped to get the kids. We approached the house and knocked on the door, but no one answered. We heard voices coming from the back yard, and that is where we found the father, mother, son and daughter cleaning out the barn.

The dear Christian lady said, “Children, you must hurry and get dressed. We’re going to be late for church.” The father put down his pitchfork and said, “The children aren’t going to church today. We’ve got to get this barn cleaned out.” As long as I live, I’ll never forget what that lady said to him. She said, “Sir, you think more of that pile of manure than you think of Jesus Christ.”

I once spoke with a young man who laughed as he said, “I know I can’t be a good Christian and an alcoholic.” What he was really saying was that he would rather have the numbing effects of alcohol coursing through his body than the peace of the Holy Spirit living in his heart. Substitute alcohol for anything you would put in front of your relationship with God. Identify what it is that could possibly come between you and Christ ... and get rid of it.

Close one eye and hold a coin an arm's distance away and the coin looks very small in comparison to all the other things you see around it. But hold the coin close to your open eye and you cannot even see what is directly in front of you. Possessions can obstruct your spiritual view. In Gadara they thought more of their porcine possessions than they did of God's Son.

I cannot find in Scripture that Jesus ever returned to Gadara. What an important lesson for us! It is reminiscent of Orpah – never to be heard from again. Choose the blessing or choose the curse. The choice is most definitely ours, but so are the consequences of that choice. Be careful not to order Jesus away from a certain area of your life. Be very careful not to tell Jesus to leave your habits and lifestyle alone. There is no guarantee that He has to return.

Before Christ left, the previously possessed man asked a question. He asked, "Lord, can I go with you?" Jesus replied, "...*Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you*" (Mark 5:19).

Just look at the wisdom of Jesus in this. If this man had gone with Christ, they would have traveled to communities where people did not know him. Some would ask, "Who is that man following Jesus?" Someone would reply, "I don't know. I hear at one time he had a demon, but I really couldn't prove it. I didn't know him in his past life."

Instead, Jesus sent Legion straight back to Decapolis. Do you think anyone knew him there? You know they did! "*And he departed and began to proclaim in Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him; and all marveled*" (Mark 5:20).

I have often wondered if he did not get half way to Decapolis, stop in his tracks and say, "Wait a minute. I can't tell others about Jesus. I haven't been to Bible College yet. My education was in the cemetery - not the seminary. I don't have a Master's degree." But he did have a Master's degree – he received it at the feet of the Master.

One reason Jesus sent him to Decapolis must surely have been the great need those people had for an evangelist. But the main reason was for the man himself. The Lord's refusal to take him with Him was the gift of something better, the making of a man. He needed to help heal those whom he had hurt. He needed the complete restoration that would come from humbling himself enough to recognize the damage he had done to others and the willingness to accept God's great strength over his great weakness.

To better understand the value of such a commission, go with me to the slums of our great cities and tell me who is toiling there among the people. Moral philosophers? I rarely meet them. They are in ivory towers discussing social problems. No, it is not those with superiority that I see in the trenches. Rather, I meet ordinary, every-day Christian men and women. When marriages that are battered, bruised



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and all but dead are resurrected with new life; when the drunk is made himself sober again; when the poor woman of the street is rescued not only from her circumstance but also from her sin, I bear witness after a long ministry, that in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, at the foundation of everything, is Christ reaching the lost through His willing servants and usually those servants have been in trenches of their own.

This Gadarian maniac, who was healed and delivered of demons, set out on a journey to become a witness for Christ, to share with everybody what Christ had done for Him, and to visit Decapolis in the name of Jesus. I can see him as he departs on his mission, clothed with the confidence of Christ, no longer naked. He went out cleansed by the blood of Christ instead of cut by self-inflicted wounds. How his heart must have swelled with gratitude when Jesus said, “I have a ministry for you to perform!”

So Legion started off to visit the ten towns of that region. He told everyone he met about the great things Jesus had done for him “...and all marveled” (Mark 5:20).

That impresses me. Ten towns were already lined up, waiting for him to come and tell what Jesus had done for him. Long before God saves us, He has already lined up areas, circumstances, organizations, people and places, waiting for us to come and witness to them and bless them with what God has done for us. It’s exciting! It might be ten houses, ten marketplaces, or ten neighborhoods. It might be ten counties, ten states, or ten nations. For Legion, it was the ten cities of Decapolis.

I don’t know what kind of speaker this healed Gadarian demoniac may have been, but opportunities were presented for him to speak with people nonetheless. Can’t you imagine Legion walking down the street when somebody stops him to ask, “Legion, how come you don’t sleep out in the graveyard anymore like you used to? Why are you all dressed up?” Others might shout, “Legion, you used to wear chains, and today the authorities are nowhere in sight!” He would reply, “There was a time when they bound me with shackles and chains, but since I met the Lord, *‘the yoke I wear is easy and my burden is light’*” (Matthew 11:30). Again, someone may have taunted, “You used to cut yourself with jagged rocks – you were always bleeding and torn up. Who do you think you are now, walking around clean like you belong with us?” He might say, “Yes, I used to do that. Inflicting pain to my body was the only way I knew to release the pain inside. But since I met Jesus, He has given me peace.”

I believe some day you and I will be looking around the New Jerusalem and we will see a man standing over to one side of that magnificent throng of people. Perhaps he won’t be standing at all; instead, he will be down on his knees praising God. Maybe you and I will help him to his feet and ask, “What is your name? How did you get here? Surely you’re not Moses, the very one who led the children out of bondage, the one who was allowed to see the Promised Land, but temporarily not permitted to enter. Is that why you’re rejoicing so much, because you are at last

in the Promised Land?" He will reply, "No, no, no! I was never privileged to be a prophet of God."

"Surely then, you must be Peter, James or John - one of those who actually walked and talked daily with Jesus, who ate and slept with Him, and witnessed His healing and teaching?" He will respond, "No, no! In fact, Jesus told me not to follow Him. I was never privileged to walk day by day with Jesus."

"Then tell us, man, what is your name? How did you get here?" We will hear him say, "I once was filled with evil. I had so many demons raging within me that they literally drove me insane. They separated me from my wife, my children, and everything I held dear in life. I would run in the desert screaming and squealing like the pigs with which I lived. I would lacerate myself with stones. I was 'The Terror of Gadara.' I was known as 'The Wild Man' - until that day Jesus called me by name. On that day I went running to meet Him, and all things were made new. The pain was gone and my tears were wiped away. My sins were forgiven. I was cleansed. I was purified. Oh, praise the precious Name of Jesus!"

Just prior to going to Gadara to set this captive free, Jesus stilled a terrible storm at sea. I believe it must be easier for God to calm the storms of nature than it is to calm the storms that rage within people's lives. Nature hears Him and obeys. We hear Him and often try to pretend we didn't. We flat out ignore Him, or maybe we can't hear Him because of the noise in our lives.

My very dear friend, W. Thomas Beckner, says of the story of Legion in his book, *Correctional Chaplains – Keepers of the Cloak*, "This account is a first century forerunner of a scenario we find acted out daily in the communities of contemporary America. In fact, it could easily serve as a metaphor of our times. But Jesus came to Decapolis one day! From that day, neither the region nor the poor uncontrollable man living in the tombs nearby was ever the same. This same result can be true today."

Sometimes it's almost laughable where God finds us. He looks down on our nest and shakes His head, "This won't do, Child. I want more for you." I think of the story of Rahab, a prostitute in the city of Jericho.

Remember the scenario? The children of Israel had been wandering around in the desert for 40 years. The generation who had seen the parting of the Red Sea was mostly gone. Their children were now the grown men and women of Israel. They had lived as survivors, eating manna from heaven and as nomads with no cozy homes of their own. Moses was not going to enter the Promised Land he'd led them to, but had sent 12 spies ahead into Canaan to report what they were up against. Joshua and Caleb were the only two who came back with a good report. Only two of the twelve men Moses sent got it. They understood God saying to them, "Yes, this bluff is high. Yes, it looks like, when you step out of this nest, you'll plummet to your death." Remember, there were giants in the land! "But I will deliver it to you."

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The other 10 spies took one look at the might of Canaan and said, “No way, Moses. Let’s stay in our nest. Yes, we’re tired of manna, but we like being alive. Let’s just keep things as they are.”

It’s easy for us now to look back on some of the things the Israelites did and think to ourselves, “Really guys? After all you saw God do for you, you still doubted Him?” But you have to remember, they didn’t have the Book we’re reading today. They were living with all the struggles and cultural hang-ups and fear of day-to-day survival that we gloss over as we read scripture. They struggled as we struggle to let go of their earthly hand-holds and security blankets and just believe God would do what He said He would do.

History tells us of the battles leading up to Jericho, and they were many. There was no internet, but word spread quickly, you can be assured of that. Runners from neighboring kingdoms would have been dispatched to bring word of the great might of the army of Israel and of the God who led them. The stories of old, that many people had forgotten, were being brought back to life. “Remember this God? Remember the Hebrew slaves and the Pharaoh who would not let them go? Remember the plagues? Remember how the slaves walked across on dry land when their God parted the Red Sea, but when Pharaoh’s army followed them, it swallowed them up? This God is coming for us!”

Can you imagine the panic in Jericho as the army of Israel drew near? Jericho had lived in arrogance for many years due to their military might and their strong walls, but the leaders would have had to have been deaf and singularly uninformed, which they surely were not, to have missed the chatter about this ragtag group of wandering ex-slaves. The armies Israel had defeated already were long shots. How would Jericho be different? Their wall. That was their Ace in the Hole. They were counting on it to protect them.

Rahab, being in demand for her profession but invisible as a woman and a harlot, must have overheard many conversations about this approaching army. Who knows why she was disillusioned enough with her people or her pagan gods to know she was on the wrong side? I am anxious to ask her these questions someday. How did she know to hide those men of God, to protect them from being found out? Even then, God had set her apart for His use because of her willing heart. He looked down into her nest and said, “This is not where you belong. Come out onto the ledge of my goodness. Yes, it will be scary. It will require faith on your part, but I will be there.”

Had the two spies known the inn where they lodged was owned by a prostitute, it’s not likely they would have gone there. There were strict religious laws against consorting with one such as this. But this is where God led them, for when word got out that two strangers had been spotted within the city gates, it didn’t take long for that word to get back to the king of Jericho - that two men from the army of Israel

were at Rahab's house.

Fortunately, Rahab was a clever lady. She had foreseen this coming and hidden them on the roof where she kept her flax. When the emissaries of the king came to her door asking for the men she was harboring, she told them they had indeed been there, but had left and skirted out the city gates just before night had fallen. She encouraged the entourage to hurry and try to catch them. Then she went to the roof and laid it all on the line.

*“Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof, and said to the men: ‘I know that the LORD has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath. Now therefore, I beg you, swear to me by the LORD, since I have shown you kindness, that you also will show kindness to my father’s house, and give me a true token, and spare my father, my mother, my brothers, my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death.’*

*“So the men answered her, ‘Our lives for yours, if none of you tell this business of ours. And it shall be, when the LORD has given us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with you.’ Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was on the city wall; she dwelt on the wall. And she said to them, ‘Get to the mountain, lest the pursuers meet you. Hide there three days, until the pursuers have returned. Afterward you may go your way’” (Joshua 2:8-16).*

From a harlot in Jericho to a hero of old in the ancestral line of Christ. Had she not ever left her nest, her story would have ended on that bloody day in Jericho. Her name would never have been recorded in the annals of the faithful.

An untamed heart ... an untamed life ... an untamed mind ... an untamed spirit – it must be stirred and booted from the nest. Only when we are forced to step out on faith can Christ show us He is there to catch us, answer our every need, forgive our every sin, heal our broken hearts, and wipe away our every tear. Christ desires to set foot on the ragged bluffs of your coast. He longs for you to take flight with a steady heart and stable mind. Do not fear the first step. Don't look down. Look up, dear friend; God is stirring your nest!



## Chapter 4

# THE HOVERING PROCESS

*“Elevated on the high dead limb of some gigantic tree  
that commands a wide view of the neighboring shore and ocean;  
He seems calmly to contemplate the motions of the various feathered tribes  
that pursue their busy avocations below –  
The snow-white gulls slowly winnowing the air;  
the busy tringa, coursing along the sands;  
Trains of ducks, streaming over the surface;  
Silent and watchful cranes, intent and wading;  
Clamorous crows; and all the winged multitudes that subsist  
by the bounty of this vast liquid magazine of nature.  
High over all these hovers one.”*

–ALEXANDER WILSON

*Eagles build their nests on craggy cliffs and lofty mountaintops. From this dizzying height, the eaglet looks down ... down ... down to the ground far below. His nice, safe, warm, comfortable nest is now riddled with holes and gaps, because Mother is stirring up the nest. It isn't as nice as it once was, but it is still home, so the eaglet hunkers down and holds on! Mama eagle will have none of that. She hovers over him, flapping her powerful wings for several seconds. She stops to rest; then begins the fierce wing beating once more.*

*The eaglet scurries back and forth inside the nest, frantically trying to escape his mother's powerful draft and feathered force. But regardless of where he goes, she is there. She made that nest. She knows it much better than he does.*

The eaglet cannot flee from his mother any more than we can escape the hovering presence of God. Time and again the scriptures reveal the hot and heavenly

pursuit of God for mankind.

God found:

- Abraham on the way that led to Sodom (Genesis 18:16)
- Balaam while talking to a very stubborn donkey (Numbers 22:31)
- Hagar in a dry and thirsty land (Genesis 21:19)
- Jacob while attending a wrestling match (Genesis 32:24)
- Job sitting in ashes and sackcloth (Job 2:8)
- John the Baptist in the midst of a baptismal service (Matthew 3:13)
- Jonah in the belly of a great fish (Jonah 1:17)
- Martha at a cemetery (John 11:38)
- Onesimus in prison (Philemon 10)
- Paul in a shipwreck (Acts 27:41)
- Peter on a fishing trip (Luke 5:4)
- Ruth walking out from under a curse (Ruth 1:16).
- Samson in handcuffs (Judges 16:21)
- The thief on the Cross as He drew His final breath (Luke 23:43).

We're never off God's radar. There is nowhere we can go to escape His presence. Whether He is hovering over our "stirred" nest, trying to get our attention, or gliding in slow, steady circles above us, He is there ... waiting. If you doubt His eagle eye, I can introduce you to someone who heard the flapping of His wings and felt God's powerful presence.

While conducting a *See Through The Scriptures* seminar at the Colorado Women's Correctional Facility in Canon City, Colorado, I was approached by a young lady who asked to speak with me privately. We stepped to the side and she began telling me her story.

She was a minister's daughter from Colorado Springs and had been reared in the church most of her life. Her family lived in the parsonage and her bedroom window faced the church building.

As a young girl, she loved to look out her window at the little white church building, and when she saw the church lights on, she would go over. It didn't matter if it was an elders' meeting, a funeral, a ladies sewing class or a wedding, she was usually there and always welcome.

Her whole life revolved around the church. On Saturdays, she would sweep the

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floors and make sure each row of seats had its appropriate number of Bibles and songbooks. She was never paid for this; she simply did it out of love for the church and her Lord Jesus Christ.

Each afternoon after school, she would go directly to the church building, where she would do her homework. Before she began she would pray, asking God to help her in her studies and thanking Him for the day.

But, when she became a teenager, she began dating a young man who was on drugs. He influenced her to experiment with them and it wasn't long before she was hooked. Later, she broke up with him, but didn't stop using narcotics. To support her drug habit she became a "mule," one who transports drugs from the seller to the buyer. The dark and ungodly world she embraced obliterated the bright, white walls of the church and the warmth of the small parsonage where she grew up. The peace of that little church house was replaced by the constant scream of desperation to get her next fix.

One day, as she was driving through Denver, she felt the familiar struggle between the life she was leading and the life she knew she was meant to lead, and decided to be done with it. She grew tired of constantly feeling dirty and guilty – torn between two worlds. Her car trunk was half loaded with drugs, and so was she. As she drove along I-70, she began to talk out loud to herself, attempting to will the conviction away. Can you hear the flutter of Mighty Wings?

Yes, the hovering process of God was in motion. She thought, "I'm a Christian, and just look at what I'm doing with my life. I'm transporting drugs. I can't keep being pulled between two worlds like this." She pulled the car over to the side of the road, got out, walked around and opened the passenger door. There she got down on her knees in the dirt, tar, gravel and grass, and putting her elbows on the passenger seat, she began to pray.

"Lord, I know I cannot be a Christian and keep living the life I'm living. So ... you lose, God. YOU LOSE!"

She stood up, slammed the car door shut, walked back to the driver's seat, got in and drove away. She ended up in prison. Her mother and father came to visit her. They asked, "Where did we go wrong? What have we done to deserve this?"

She told me that day at the seminar, "Brother Joe, it was nothing they did or didn't do. I had choices to make and I made them. God didn't turn His back on me; I turned my back on Him."

Then she reached out her hand and showed me a neatly folded handkerchief. "This handkerchief has wiped away a thousand tears." She opened it and inside was a piece of paper containing her father's telephone number. With a shaky voice she said, "After you leave the prison tonight, would you please phone him and tell him that I have made my decision to give my life back to Jesus?"

That was one of the most rewarding phone calls I was ever asked to make!

There was already great rejoicing among the angels in heaven, but her mother, father and church family quickly joined them.

Was her heavenly Father watching her every inch of the way as she spiraled downward toward spiritual destruction? Did He hear that car door slam on her childhood faith, the Church, and any future relationship with Him? Did the Lord accompany her to prison?

The answer to all of these questions is YES! He is waiting, watching, and yearning for all of us to surrender to Him so He can bear us up on eagles' wings. One of His main means of accomplishing this is by allowing His Holy Spirit to work through His Holy Word to convict our hearts and souls!

Some of the "wings" God used to hover over His people in the Old Testament were called prophets. Their writings comprise one-fourth of the entire Bible. Hear the words of the prophets as they were used of God to flutter over Israel and Judah:

*"You rulers of Sodom ... you people of Gomorrah. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to me? Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow"* (Isaiah 1:10,11,16,17).

Listen to those "wings" as they plead with people to hear the word of the Lord. Their nests were all but gone; there was nothing below them to hold them up once the last few twigs were jarred loose by the powerful winds blowing around them, and still they refused to heed the warnings.

The mother eagle doesn't hover because she enjoys scaring her eaglet. She doesn't get a kick out of watching him clamor for refuge. These same accusations are hurled at God when lives don't go as human's plan. Even as Christians, we sometimes wonder why God is allowing our nests to fall apart. Can He not see? Does He not care? At times we are tempted to take matters into our own hands. We shout in defiance that we've had enough of this hovering business ... enough with unfulfilled expectations, and one challenge after another. Enough waiting to see what God is going to do. We claw and grapple in staunch resistance to His flapping, holy wings and then decide to handle the matter on our own.

It's a laughable concept, but one most of us have made in one way or another. We're like the eaglet, desperately trying to shove twigs in all the open places in our life, furiously trying to fix our nest. Even Abraham, the father of faith, and his wife Sarah were guilty of this.

God had promised them a son. Actually, He had promised them much more. He told Abraham he would be the father of many nations and that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars (Genesis 15:5). So there they were, in their nice little nest of promises and a hopeful future, and they waited ... and waited ... and waited.

Finally Sarah, who wasn't getting any younger, thought to herself, "It looks



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like I'm going to have to step in on this one and help God out a little." So she took her maidservant, Hagar, and gave her to her husband, Abraham. When Hagar conceived, Sarah despised her and turned on Abraham saying, "*The Lord judge between you and me*" (Genesis 16:1-5).

Abraham certainly wasn't blameless! No more blameless than Adam was in the Garden of Eden. They both saw their wives pushing ahead of God and did nothing to stop it; in fact, they joined in.

We know what came of Ishmael's and Isaac's rivalry – a consequence we are still dealing with in the Middle East to this day. What a dangerous thing it is to get ahead of God! If we will but patiently wait upon the Lord, He will, in due time, lift us up on eagle's wings and we will soar. When we read the rest of the story, we see that God stepped in, made a way through their fumbling mistakes and colossal errors, and fulfilled his promise anyway, even if they had rather let Him down.

God hovered over the wicked people of Noah's day through Noah's lone voice. The people mocked him and refused to hear. They drowned in a flood of rebellion.

God hovered over Pharaoh through Moses, who pleaded with him to let God's people go. But Pharaoh would have no part of it and was swept away in a sea of defiance.

These mighty wings that hover over us to guide us are the same wings that offer us protection.

*"He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, 'He is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in Him I will trust.' Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the perilous pestilence. He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge; His truth shall be your shield and buckler."* (Psalm 91:1-4)

After having read this verse on many occasions, I began to realize that it blended with dozens of other scriptures as a larger message of the goodness, mercy and peace of God, and of His might and protection. But then something new jumped out at me. "*For the word of God is living and powerful...*" (Hebrews 4:12).

Look at verse 1 – when we " *dwell in the secret place of the Most High*" – and now at verse 3 – then, "*Surely He will deliver you.*" Think about the shadows those great wings can produce. They can create quite a bit of shade, comfort and confidence.

Just as our physical bodies seek shade to protect us from the harsh rays of the sun; our soul seeks shade under the shelter of His wings. Have you ever forgotten to apply sunscreen or maybe fallen asleep at the beach or by the pool? You're dismayed, but not surprised, when you awaken with a terrible sunburn. You are annoyed by the inconvenience of the limitations in the way you move for a couple of days and the way all of your clothes rub your sore body in all of the wrong places. But you're not surprised by it and you're certainly not blaming the sun for shining. You realize it was stupidity on your own part. Why then do we blame God when,

by our own choice, we step out from under the shield and shade of His wing and something bad happens to us?

Sometimes, as in the above examples of Bible characters that chose to ignore God's hovering, it is the hand of God bringing about the struggles in our lives. Other times, afflictions come upon us through free will – both our desires and that of others. But God promises us in Jeremiah 29:11, *“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.”* No matter what hardship may come our way, He can bring blessing out of tragedy and beauty from ashes.

Sometimes the role a believer is asked to live is often a painful one. But it is, in the end, for God's glory, and those strong enough to endure the flapping have a story to share that will change the hearts of many.

Richard Wurmbrand (pronounced Vurmbrand) was a Romanian pastor who was imprisoned and tortured for fourteen years in his own homeland. When the communists seized Romania in 1945, one of their first objectives was to command and control the churches.

Wurmbrand was an outstanding Christian leader, author and educator. He disappeared into the underground church and began an effective and vigorous ministry among his enslaved people. He and his wife, Sabine, were arrested in 1948 and sentenced to hard labor for three years. He was locked away in solitary confinement – and for three years saw no one except his torturers. Eventually, Sabine was released and Richard was transferred to a “mass” cell, but the torture continued for five more years.

When family and friends asked about his safety, they were told that he had fled Romania. Secret police, posing as ex-prisoners, told his wife that she should forget about him because they had attended his burial in the prison cemetery. His loved ones did not know what to believe.

After eight years he was released and within days resumed his ministry to the underground church. In 1959, he was rearrested and sentenced to twenty-five years in prison. A few years later, the communist government began selling political prisoners. In 1964, Christians in Norway successfully negotiated with the communists for his purchase. The going rate was \$1,900. His price was \$10,000.

In May of 1966, he appeared before the Senate Internal Security Sub-Committee in Washington, D.C. He removed his shirt and showed them eighteen deep wounds that had been reopened numerous times. Newspapers carried his story around the world with headlines which read: “A LIVING MARTYR,” “THE IRON CURTAIN PAUL,” and “THE VOICE OF THE UNDERGROUND CHURCH.”

In September of 1966, he received a number of death threats from the Romanian government, but they could not silence him. He was more determined than ever to speak out about the depraved, evil, hateful, obscene, repugnant and wicked

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acts committed by the communists against the church.

He told of Pastor Florescu, who was tortured with red-hot knives and pokers and had starving rats funneled into his cell through a drainage pipe. The pastor could not sleep because he had to defend himself at all times. If he rested for one moment the rats would attack.

On one occasion, Pastor Florescu was forced to stand day and night for two weeks because he would not reveal where the Christians were hiding. When this did not work, they brought in his fourteen-year-old son, Alexander, and began whipping him in front of his father. They said, “We will beat your son to death if you do not give us the information we want.”

Mr. Wurmbrand said, “It did not take long for Pastor Florescu to break down. He could stand it no longer. He told Alexander that he was going to tell them what they wanted to know. Alexander replied, “Father, do not do me the injustice of having a traitor as a parent. If they kill me, I will die with the name of Jesus on my lips.”

The crazed communists beat Alexander to death and left his blood splattered on all four walls of his father’s cell. The child died praising God. Brother Florescu was never the same after that. The road to Heaven is soaked with the blood and tears of the saints, and God weeps with them.

*“He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces; the rebuke of His people He will take away from all the earth; for the Lord has spoken.”* (Isaiah 25:8) *“And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away”* (Revelation 21:4).

Great men and women of God have never been *in* the ministry – the ministry has been *in* them. Like Wurmbrand, the prophets of old could not help but cry out to the people. They warned the worldly that God wanted more than fine buildings and offerings; He wanted their obedience. They challenged the warriors to not align themselves with nations who did not honor God, nor to follow earthly kings, but to place their faith in the only true conqueror – the King of Kings. Time and again, they proclaimed the consequences of an adulterous nation telling them of the fruit of their unfaithfulness. Houses they built, but would not inhabit; vineyards they planted, but would not harvest unless they turned back to God. The prophets, full of God’s power and spirit, spoke hard truths to hardened hearts telling the people they were like silly senseless doves, fluttering here and fluttering there crying, *“Peace! When there is no peace”* (Ezekiel 13:10).

With courage they pronounced the penalty for such sins as though the Lord Himself were standing over them and boldly indicted the wrath and judgment. Yes, ministry comes from within and from above!

Jeremiah wept and Hosea loved. Joel lamented and Zechariah begged for repentance. Each one of these and thousands more of God’s hands and feet and voices

and hearts have carried out the “hovering over us” process of the Lord to express His great care and love for us. The eagle analogy perfectly depicts the intimate, omnipotent nature of the God who knows our faults, as well as our needs. And sometimes our greatest need, as with the eaglet, is to leave our comfort zone!

Joseph had quite a comfort zone going – the favored son of his father, Jacob, living in the lap of luxury as the young “prince” of his family. Jacob gave him a special coat of many colors that was like a beacon of Joseph’s favored status blinking crudely in the eyes of his brothers. That, coupled with his bizarre and self-elevating dreams, proved to be the last straw. When their jealousy finally got the better of them, they seized a rare opportunity to take him down a notch or two. Actually, their original intent was to kill him, but his oldest brother, Rueben, being led by the Lord despite his ignorance of the fact, saved Joseph from that fate. Instead, they stripped him of his coat, his birthright and his father’s influence in his life and threw him in a pit, only to eventually sell him to some passing traders.

No longer a “prince” in his father’s house, but a slave in Egypt, Joseph learned what it was to truly lean on the God his father had taught him about. In Genesis 39, we read several times that “*the Lord was with Joseph.*” As the story progresses, it’s easy to wonder how this could possibly be as Joseph seems to take one step forward and two back.

At one point, he ends up in the household of a wealthy official named Potipher. Potipher came to value Joseph to such an extent that he put all he owned in Joseph’s care and Potipher’s house prospered. Knowing he started as the chattel of the traders, Potipher’s house was a definite step forward. All seems to be going well. Wait for it...two steps back are waiting just around the corner. This wealthy and powerful man has put everything that is his in Joseph’s capable hands. Everything that is, except his wife. When she takes a shine to Joseph and decides to pursue him, Joseph is left with no choice, but to run. Literally. He runs from her as she grabs at his cloak. In fact, she doesn’t let go and he wriggles out of it, leaving her holding evidence of his presence, which she uses against him.

We’ve read the story. It might be easy for us to nod our heads and pat Joseph on the back in our mind’s eye for “doing the right thing” when Potipher’s wife pursued him, but in fact, it was not easy at all. She had been pursuing him for days, weeks, possibly months. She had most likely promised him secrecy and more riches than he knew what to do with. She had likely attempted to stroke his ego and promised to “put a bug in her husband’s ear” about promoting him even further or giving him a raise. Regardless of all these possibilities, Joseph knew at the very moment she grabbed for him that it was a no-win situation. If he slept with her, he would most likely be found out and lose his job and probably his life; but more than that, he would lose his self-respect and the intimacy he had with his God by sinning against him. Simply put, she wasn’t worth it.

## The Hovering Process

We've all heard the saying about "a woman scorned". In fact, I have to wonder if it might have come from this story because she definitely took Joseph's rejection personally and decided to make him pay. She lied to her husband, accused Joseph of attacking her and he landed in jail. Back in another kind of pit. Two steps back, right?

Wrong, because even as he served a sentence he'd done nothing to earn, scripture reminds us "*the Lord was with Joseph*" and Joseph did not forget this, but continued to trust God with his very life. And next we read, "*He was soon put in charge of all the prisoners and made responsible for everything that was done there*" (Gen. 39:22). God was hovering still and he continued to stir Joseph's nest.

Several years into his prison sentence, Joseph was called to interpret a dream the Pharaoh had which his most learned advisors and wise men could not interpret. Now Pharaoh was the greatest ruler of the greatest kingdom of that time. He wore the emblem of a cobra on his headpiece as a sign that his reach extended beyond a normal man's boundaries and that his strike was quick and deadly. He was actually revered as a god and saw himself as one. This is the man who called Joseph to him. So you can imagine that jaws dropped as Joseph stood before him and replied, "*I cannot do it.*" Can you feel the flutter of wings?

Joseph then went on, "*But God will give Pharaoh the answers he desires.*" You can almost hear the collective sigh of relief as the attendants release the breath they've been holding since Joseph entered the room. As God gives Joseph the wisdom to interpret Pharaoh's dreams, even Pharaoh can see "the Lord is with Joseph" and eventually places him second in command of his great kingdom. So Joseph, a slave to the world, but a servant of the Living God, literally went from rags to riches under the hovering process as God stirred his nest in order to put him in a position to save the family who once sold him into slavery.

You see? God's plans are bigger for us than we could ever hope or imagine, but they won't be accomplished in the nest.

A Native-American legend paints the picture of a different type of safety net, as far from an eagle's nest as one can get. It lies on the ocean floor. The legend says that when God made the oyster, He guaranteed him extra help. He knew the oyster's heart was small and its instincts weak. He made it for beauty and for prey. And so, He built the oyster a house of shell to protect him from his enemies. When hungry, the oyster simply opens his shell and food rushes in. God knew that otherwise, the oyster would sit there and starve! God does not stir the oyster's nest. He is right where he belongs, but we're not called to be oysters. We're called to be eagles!

When God made the eagle, He formed in him a strong heart and sharp instinct, and He said, "Go and build your house. The blue sky is the limit." So the eagle went and built his house upon the highest mountain peak, where storms threatened him every day. He often had to fly through torrents of rain, snow and wind to seek his food. It is the eagle, not the oyster that is the symbol God uses to compare Himself

to His followers and His followers to Him. He trusted that this creation would not cower in a closed shell, but take flight into the wild blue.

So don't scramble to patch the holes in that pathetic nest in which you are nestled. Allow God to lead you out of it. Trust Him as the storms come. He created you to thrive and grow stronger and more beautiful every day. Take flight with Him. He will take you places never imagined!

Remember, as you soar, that God not only carries you, He watches over you. I once saw a plaque that read, CAUTION: GOD IS WATCHING YOU! Then in small letters along the bottom were the words, "Because He loves you so much He just can't take His eyes off of you." He who created the world is looking with intense interest upon you at this very moment. God declares, "*I will guide you with My eye*" (Psalm 32:8).

The great Apostle Paul found his direction, refuge and strength in such a guiding light. At the height of his missionary career, when he was accomplishing more for Christ than at any other time in his ministry, this same God, in whom Paul followed wholeheartedly, allowed him to be arrested and put on a ship headed for a Roman prison. On the way he was shipwrecked, stranded on an island, and then bitten by a snake.

Paul's whole life shouted the spectacular message that God specializes in the impossible; that man's limitation is but God's opportunity. Both the shipwreck and the snakebite came by the sovereignty of God. God did not give Paul overcoming life; He gave him life as he overcame.

Paul's fourth missionary journey would be as a prisoner; nevertheless, he would remain faithful to the spiritual vision God had given him because he was devoted to a person - not to a cause or to a system. Sitting in a jail cell, he still soared with Christ.

Paul's constant desires were for the maturity of the Church and the conversion of sinners, and his only hope was in a hovering God. Therefore he died to everything that was not in Christ. Festus said Paul was out of his mind (Acts 26:24). The same had been said about Jesus (Mark 3:21). Because Paul drew his direction, refuge and strength from God and God alone, he had nothing to seek but the glory of God; nothing to fear but His displeasure if he lingered instead of left. He was content in the palace or in the prison, but was never content to remain in the nest. Neither should we settle for anything less than God's best.



## Chapter 5

# LEAVING THE NEST

*“Out on the ledge of a foreign terrain,  
The eaglet peers at the pouring rain.  
And wonders why Mother has brought him here,  
To a place of harshness, a place of fear.  
He knows not yet of the wind that will carry him high above this storm,  
He knows not yet of the freedom he’ll cherish and of how  
those skies will be home.  
For now, he longs only of what he is sure, O  
f all his comforts before.  
But God has not made him for small things and nests –  
God has made him to soar.”*

**-ANGELA BROWER**

*The little bird watches as his mother hovers for a few seconds ... hovers then rests, hovers then rests. If this fails to motivate him, the female eagle has been known not to feed him, but rather lay a fish or morsel of meat on a separate ledge or limb just out of reach. With his dinner beyond convenience, the juvenile has to “fly or die.”*

*For the first time, the eaglet feels the solid rock beneath his young talons as he climbs out of the nest. He jumps up and down several dozen times enjoying the smooth, cool surface. Next, he runs along the ledge flapping his wings. They don’t yet work, but they give him a hint of things to come; his next move: to jump, run and flap, simultaneously.*

Step by step – degree by degree, precisely depicts the way God teaches us to use our spiritual wings. First, He makes of us “a new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Then,

only three verses later, He calls us “*ambassadors for Christ*” (2 Corinthians 5:20).

I personally experienced this remarkable transition between becoming a new creation and being commissioned for royal service, after confessing Christ during an old-fashioned revival in my hometown of Richland, Missouri. I was baptized the following Sunday in the beautiful Gasconade River that flows through the south-central portion of the state. Oh, the joy of being “*buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life*” (Romans 6:4).

I was not only identifying with His death, burial and resurrection, I was participating in it. What great delight and happiness I experienced in my newfound Rock that God had, at great price, provided for me to stand upon.

How beautiful the Church was when I came up out of that watery grave of Christian baptism. How admirable were her apostles, evangelists, pastors, prophets and teachers. I felt just like that eaglet on the mountaintop, as I was “born again” into a whole new life and purpose. I wished that everyone in the whole world could experience what had just happened to me.

But God would not allow me to stay on that “ledge” – as astounding as it was. He had greater plans for me. He allowed both blessings and difficulties to arise, which forced me to use my God-given wings.

As I stood barefoot on the shore, there is no way that I could possibly have imagined that I was destined to graduate from Ozark Bible College in Joplin, Missouri, and later receive its Outstanding Alumnus Award, “*In recognition of outstanding achievement as a prison minister and world evangelist.*” I never could have dreamed that God would someday call me to conduct revivals and evangelistic campaigns across America and in 48 nations around the world.

Nor could I have envisioned that:

- A witch doctor would tell little children “white men eat black babies,” in an effort to prevent me from starting a church in his remote village in Haiti
- Government soldiers would provide security for me while I preached in remote villages of the Philippines that were overrun by rebel forces
- Hindu militants would beat to death an Indian man I had just baptized, because he became a Christian
- I would be privileged to enter Vietnam with the Gospel after the last of the American troops had been evacuated
- I would found American Rehabilitation Ministries, a nation-wide jail and prison ministry with branch offices in Cambodia, Mexico, Russia and the Philippines



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- I would meet with, and play a vital role in the baptism of, General Manuel Antonio Noriega, former President of Panama
- I would receive recognition from four U.S. Presidents for “*significant and lasting contributions in the field of corrections*”
- I would receive the good confession of faith from a Satan-worshipping drug lord in a correctional facility in Alaska
- I would, along with my daughter, Stephanie, co-found Rapha House, a safe house for trafficked girls, which now has homes in several nations
- Linda and I would reside in and represent a Christian mission in Israel
- My ministry would be the first to airlift baptisteries filled with Bibles to be used in the prison systems of Armenia, Russia, Siberia, the Baltic’s, and the Ukraine
- My ministry would be the first to ship Communion Table Baptisteries through the Great Wall of China
- Through the heroic efforts of four Christian inmates, I would be escorted to safety in the middle of a violent prison disturbance in Alabama
- While serving as a missionary to South Korea I would baptize more than 3,000 people, including a Buddhist monk

Sharing these things isn’t easy for me, because I’m well aware that anything I have done has only been accomplished because of Christ Jesus. I certainly don’t want to boast. I remember Paul said that he could not boast of himself – but he would boast in the Lord (2 Corinthians 12:5). So, I will boast only of things *He* has accomplished in and through me.

After surrendering to Christ, God began to “stir up my nest” and “hover over me” through His holy and inspired Word. As I grew in the Lord, read the Bible and pursued faith, the message came to me loud and clear that God has no feet but our feet and no tongues but our tongues to show and tell a fallen and sin-sick world about Christ. In my case, God used the Holy Scriptures to convict me of the need to leave my nest and rise to higher spiritual planes.

God also used Sunday school teachers, ministers, Bible college professors and evangelists to grow me in the faith. One man who had a great impact on my early Christian life was the famed evangelist Reggie Thomas. I met him the first time when I was a junior in high school. He was a striking figure and there was nothing phony about him. He was a true man of God and continues to be to this day. I immediately wanted to be like him. It was impossible to remain cold and indifferent

toward missions when you sat in his services.

I began reading everything I could get my hands on about him. Some of his sermons and illustrations were published regularly by the Christian Restoration Association in Cincinnati, Ohio. I even purchased some of his early sermon books and anything containing information about him. One of his most thrilling stories was about a missionary in Africa who was returning home for furlough. No one could tell it like Reggie Thomas, and over the years it convicted many people for foreign missionary service. Here it is word for word as he would tell it. Just imagine yourself sitting in a packed auditorium as he relates this story.

“A missionary had labored for five years in the Congo, and at the end of that time found himself to be exhausted, homesick and physically ill. With great joy he boarded the little riverboat that would take him downstream to the seaport town where he would catch an ocean liner back to America.

“As this little riverboat made its way downstream, it stopped at various villages along the way to let off cargo and take on supplies. During one of these regular village stops, a group of curious pygmies gathered around the little boat and started chattering noisily. Someone noticed the white man on board and recognized him as the missionary from upstream.

“Soon all the pygmies began to shout, ‘White man, you come and preach to us and tell us about your God.’ But the missionary explained that he could not do it because he was on his way home for his furlough. This excuse meant nothing to the pygmies and they shouted all the louder, ‘No, white man. You must come today and tell us about your God.’

“Patiently, the missionary tried again to explain his problem. He told the pygmies that the great ship at the port would not wait and that he had to get there to catch it in order to return home. Then, to try and reassure them, he made a promise. ‘When I return next year, I will come to your village. It will be the very first place that I go. I will preach God’s Word to you then.’

“But this did not satisfy the pygmies. They only shouted all the louder and insisted that he come at once. By this time, the cargo had been transferred and the captain gave the orders to ‘push back.’ The ropes were loosened from the dock and the little ship quietly slipped out into the Congo stream and the engine started. When the pygmies realized he was not going to come and preach to them, the leader of the group angrily shook his fist and shouted, ‘White man, I’m going to tell your God on you!’”

Yes, of all the things he wrote and preached it was his missionary sermons and stories that inspired me most. As a young teenager I wanted to become a full-time evangelist just like him, and even someday go to the mission field.

After my years in Korea, TV evangelist Cecil Todd hired me to travel overseas conducting evangelistic campaigns around the world. I will forever be indebted to

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Cecil. He literally turned my greatest dream into a reality. And my career as a world-wide soul-winner was born.

God does not desire that we live meager little lives, never sharing what He is doing in our walk with Him. It is an encouragement and a blessing to others and the credit is not ours, but God's. So, I have shared with you where I began and what He has been doing in my life until now. I hope it encourages you to know that if a boy from small-town Missouri can go to these places and do these things, then you can fulfill whatever His goal and purpose is for your life. But, to do so, you *must* get out of the nest, one foot in front of the other.

I still don't understand why some things happened in my life and why other things did not, but I do know that sometimes God has to hide from us what He is doing until we develop enough Christian character that He can reveal it to us. God loves us just the way we are ... like the mother eagle loves her eaglet. But also like her, He loves us too much to let us stay that way.

I learned of such an eagle kind of love when I heard a young woman speak at our church. She had grown up as the daughter of a man who was in and out of prison her entire life. She fell into his familiar world and ended up a junkie. Her words were, "There is nothing you can imagine that I probably haven't done ... including murder."

So how did this woman meet Jesus?

The last time her father came out of prison, he came out a preacher. He felt called to minister the gospel and that's what he did, starting with his own daughter. Over time, his dedication and example convinced her he'd found something she needed, and she also gave her life to Christ.

She, in turn, started a ministry to women on the street -- women coming out of drug addiction, women trying to give up a cycle of anger and abuse, or escape it. She is changing the world around her. I looked at her and thought – *one foot in front of the other*. Her father took the first step and she followed. He came out from under the curse, responded to God's hovering and stirring, and left the nest of his criminal life-style to soar high with Christ, taking his daughter and countless others with him.

Leaving the nest is a terrifying thing. It challenges everything we know and think we believe. Remember the biblical account of Martha? She felt the tug between routine and uncertainty. She loved the Lord. She organized a huge dinner party for Him and worked herself silly making sure everything was just right. But then her brother died. When Martha heard the Lord was in town, she went to meet him, overflowing with fear-filled accusations:

*"Now Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house. Now Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever You ask*

*of God, God will give You.'*

*Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said to Him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.' Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?' She said to Him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world'" (John 11:20-27).*

She came running out to meet him and her first words were, *"Lord, if You had been here."* It sounds a little accusatory, doesn't it? She must have sensed a wave of conviction, because she immediately followed it with, *"But even now, I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You."*

Isn't that just like our faith? We hear ourselves sounding less than confident, less than content, and less than at peace with His will for us. Then, instantly, we hedge a little. Look at Martha: *"I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."* She's voicing her faith in what's to come ultimately, but stopping just short of saying what she's really hoping Jesus will do. Don't we do the same?

Often, when crisis or tragedy strikes, we try to solve things in the flesh when God is sitting on His throne, shaking His holy head, waiting for us to back off so He can begin a great work in us. Our efforts alone are so futile. We have to remain rooted in faith and working at the task He has given us, trusting Him to *"work all things together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."* (Romans 8:28)

I will never forget a situation that took place in Suriname, South America. I was there to do a week-long revival. The missionary, Shikri Ali, and his family knew well the challenge before us in a primarily Hindu city. In fact, he and his family lived in a neighborhood that was all Hindu, with the intent to be among the people, and to see and be seen close up on a daily basis.

One of the first evenings we were in his home, we were eating spam sandwiches. They thought this was something all Americans would enjoy! My daughter, Angela, had discreetly slipped hers into her pocket and later, when we were out on their front porch, she fed it to the dog. Shikri happened to come out just as the dog was hungrily lapping up the last of his treat.

"Oh, you fed him a treat?" he said with a smile. "I'm surprised he took food from your hand."

"Why is that?" my embarrassed daughter asked him.

"Well, he is not our first dog. In fact, he is our fourth. He almost died once from the same thing by which we lost the other three."

"What did they die of?" she asked nervously.

"They were poisoned; but they saved my family. You see, this neighborhood does not want us here. We were given a welcome basket – a huge banana leaf filled

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with delicious looking foods. But the person who left it didn't knock or let us know they were here. They just set it over the gate onto the front porch.

"Well, the dogs found it first. This one here must have been the smallest, because he got the least. When we came outside, three of the dogs lay dead and this one, almost. My family and I would have eaten that food, believing it was a welcome gift from a friendly neighbor."

Angela looked at the dog standing before her, realizing the mutt was a hero. She came to see that God will use absolutely anyone or anything to accomplish His work!

The day before the revival was to begin, Shikri and I got word that his two year-old grandson was very sick and probably dying. After prayer, we all sat stunned, not knowing what we could possibly say.

In typical Martha fashion, we began to try and work a solution to figure out how they could go and be with their daughter and grandson. A ship would take several days, and to rent a small private plane was beyond our financial means.

Shikri shook his head. "There is nothing we can do but pray and continue to do the work God has given us. He knows how powerful this week is going to be. Satan is attempting to destroy it. God's will must be done."

I was stunned by his faith. And later in the week, when they got word that their grandson had passed away, they grieved while still praising God every night at the revival. Their faithfulness in the face of great human loss and tragedy was an inspiration to us all.

That revival challenged and changed countless lives. In a mostly Hindu community, several people came to know Christ. We were witnesses to people casting idols out of their houses and of others returning to their families. We sat in the home of brand new Christians at a celebration, as they rid their home of all Hindu idols and written materials. In spite of death, God brought new life to them and to us.

Martha wanted to believe. She wanted to have unwavering faith, but the circumstances of her earthly life and her grief got in the way momentarily and kept her clinging to the nest of familiarity.

And what about doubting Thomas? He was the only disciple who actually had to touch Christ's wounds to believe it was Him. Poor Thomas, his doubt was so human, but it's what we'll forever remember about him. I'm sure his faith grew by leaps and bounds that day as he crawled out of the nest and stretched his trembling hand out to touch his Lord.

What of Gideon who couldn't just hear and believe God, but tested Him. First he witnessed a miracle, but as soon as the Angel of the Lord left, his faith faltered again. The next time he was asked to step out in faith, he required not one, but two fleeces (Judges 6)! He was out of the nest, but still jumping and testing the ledge, not quite ready to jump off and take flight.

It's easy to look at these stories in the Bible and see where they made their mistakes. It is so obvious now that it's all written down in a condensed format for us to read from the outside looking in. Had we lived it, we would have probably been just as oblivious. In our own lives, we are asked to fly all the time, but far too often, we jump around on the edge of the ledge of faith, afraid of the unknown.

We might not even recognize these "ledge excuses" as fears. We may mask them and wrap them up in words more like "that's just my opinion" or "that's just not my gift," or "I just don't have a heart for that," or "that's just my weakness." And all the while, God is saying, "Please just trust me. I want you to fly!"

I have toured the Alaskan prison system several times. I prefer going in the dead of winter because there are fewer activities for the prisoners; consequently my seminars are better attended because more are looking for an excuse to get out of their cells.

One winter, I was scheduled to teach an in-prison seminar at the Palmer Correctional Center and was to stay in the home of a dear Christian friend just outside Palmer. He was not fond of prisoners and could not bring himself to understand why I would go to the expense and trouble to travel all the way to Alaska to minister to them.

On the very first night I was in his home he said, "Joe, why are you wasting your time with these guys? You could be doing much more in other areas of ministry. So many of them will backslide and end up in prison again." On and on he went.

Finally, his wife said, "Your words are discouraging to Joe." My friend replied by quoting Jeremiah 13:23, "*Can the leopard change its spots?*" It's just like putting a pig's tail in a long narrow tube and burying it. You can dig it up a year later and it will curl back again."

Ice crystals began forming the night our seminar started. You probably have never witnessed ice crystals if you have never been as far north as Palmer, AK in the dead of winter. They look like fog but are actually little crystals of ice that build up on your headlights and windshield. My friend said, "There's no way you can drive up that mountain to the prison with this ice fog the way it is. I'll have to take you." So up the slippery slope we went. (*And God smiled.*)

When we got to the prison, it was too cold for him to sit outside in the car for three hours, so he had no choice but to come to the chapel with me. He waited until all the prisoners came in and took their seats; then, when he saw three empty chairs together, he sat down in the middle one and laid his things in the chairs beside him so they were unavailable. His face and body language said it all, "I don't want to be here. Don't bother me and I won't bother you."

We were about one hour into that first night's program when in through the doors came a prisoner with hair down to his waist and a curse word tattooed across his forehead. He looked to the right and to the left and saw my friend sitting there all by himself. The prisoner walked over, moved some of his things to the floor, and sat down beside him. (*And God smiled.*)

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Each hour we would take a ten-minute break so the prisoners could stand up and stretch. During each break that prisoner was like glue on my friend. The prisoner really seemed to like him and on one occasion asked him, “Do you know why I’m here?”

If he could have read my friend’s mind, he would have heard him say, “No, and I don’t care.”

Ice fog set in again the second night so once again I had to be chauffeured. The inmates were waiting for us at the chapel door. Everywhere my friend went that night, this same prisoner followed. And so it continued for four nights. My friend listened to twelve hours of Bible teaching with his undesirable shadow by his side each minute of the way.

At the conclusion of the seminar, we formed a prayer circle. I went through the plan of salvation and said, “We are not looking for numbers tonight. If no one steps forward that’s fine. But if there is someone who needs Jesus Christ in their life, and who wants to become a Christian, then please step into the middle of this circle.”

The rough, longhaired, tattooed prisoner dropped the hands of the men on both sides of him. Since he had never been to church and had no idea how to respond to an invitation, he almost jumped into the middle of the circle. He fell to his knees in front of my friend, looked up at him and said, “I do! I do! I want to become a Christian. I want to be just like you!”

About a month after I had returned to “the lower 48,” I received a phone call from the prison chaplain. He said, “Joe, you know that friend of yours who drove you to the prison each night? He just finished my volunteer training program and he’ll be coming in each Wednesday to teach a Bible study.” (*And God smiled!*)

Thank you, Lord, for ice crystals!

My friend learned to see through a frozen fog how God makes a way to the heart of the most unexpected soul. If seeing one small glimpse this side of eternity brings such joy, imagine what wonderful things await those who hope in faith for what’s to come.

Sometimes we are ready to leave our nests, but only on our terms. We want to make deals with God and tell him exactly how our journey from nest to sky is going to look. This was the case for a man named Kelly Lawson. I would like to share it in his words through a letter I received from him.

*“Dear Brother Garman:*

*There has been much water under the bridge since we last met. If you remember, I had taught the gospel to one of the Hell’s Angels, Moses Malone, and you baptized him in a huge trash can full of water at the Federal Penitentiary in Leavenworth, KS. I think you got almost as wet as he did...Moses was a real big boy!*

*It is long overdue that I write and thank you and ARM for coming “to me when*

*I was in prison” and giving me the fine Christian education I received that has made my lifelong ministry possible.*

*After being a fugitive from justice for over 5 years, robbing a bank or two a year, I was unpacking a suitcase while laying low one day and there was the Bible my dad had given me when I'd left his home years before. I thought to myself, 'I have never even read that thing.' I had been raised in the Church of Christ and knew all the Sunday School stories – I just didn't know Jesus. I began reading at Genesis 1:1 and read the whole thing in a little over a month. You really can read the whole Bible in a month if that's all you do! And I came to realize God was truly the One and only Living God and I had really and truly blown the life he'd given me. So, naturally, I began to negotiate with God. I told Him, 'If you just let me get away with this one last job I'm planning, I'll retire and go to Tahiti and not cause you any more trouble.' Well, we know God always answers prayer and He said, "No." Within a few days, the FBI shot all my doors in and because of my organized crime background, I was on my way to the worst prison on the face of the earth at that time, Leavenworth. That was where they sent all the convicts when they closed Alcatraz down. It was indeed a dark place. As a brand new Christian in 1973 at Leavenworth, I learned it was not a popular thing to be among the convicts. Christians were assumed to be snitches, stool pigeons, punks or sissies - not a very good reputation to have being the youngest man at Leavenworth at just 26. But God was with me like He was with Joseph in prison. God never promised to deliver us from our trials, but rather, to deliver us IN our trials. So it was in the furnace of affliction I learned His discipline.*

*I wrote to Churches of Christ since I was familiar with them. I wrote to schools of preaching and colleges everywhere for Bible studies. I found that convicts and prison ministries were not very popular. I beseeched the Preston Road School of Preaching, here in Dallas to please consider accepting me when I got out and their reply was a flat, 'No. We do not accept ex-convicts.' Then I wrote to George Faull at Treaty University of Evangelism, now Summit Theological Seminary. He directed me to you where the expense of my college courses was covered. I took one course at a time and I took every course I could, truly learning all God had to show me. At the same time, I read other sources from the Leavenworth library like J.W. McGarvey and B.W. Johnson. God's providence made me the Chaplain's clerk at Leavenworth, which allowed time to teach and baptize hundreds.*

*After my release, I became an evangelist at a local Church of Christ, then a volunteer chaplain and then the Sheriff Department Staff Chaplain of the Dallas County Jails, teaching and baptizing over a thousand inmates a year for 3 years. After preaching to 5,000 at the Tulsa Soul Winning Workshop, the Preston Road Church of Christ asked if I would come and preach on Graduation Sunday for their student body. As I stood before the church,*



## Leaving the Nest

*I prayed silently, 'Lord, if it had not been for Your plan, George Faull and Joe Garman at ARM, I could not be standing here today. I would not have been making a difference in the lives, minds and hearts of these young people before me. I would have rotted in jail or died in the line of my criminal behavior. Instead, you had a better plan for my life and I have already taught and baptized thousands upon thousands.'*

*For the past 23 years, I have served as the minister of the congregation I was raised in. I got to bury my mom and dad whom I shamed, but praise God, they saw me returned to the God they had taught me about. I have lived out the Prodigal Son's story in my own life. We preach the Gospel to the entire world twice each Lord's Day by broadcasting a one hour worship service designed to help establish house churches in places that are not free to worship. We have established over 5,000 house churches world-wide and will soon begin broadcasting from the nation of Madagascar beginning later this year. This will make 3 broadcasts to all the world by 100,000 watt short wave and our eight other AM and FM stations.*

*Look what you have set in motion, "every seed bears after its own kind." Our Jail and Prison Chaplain, Eddie Frazier, reaches and baptizes about a thousand prisoners a year and he has baptized over 17,000 since we set him apart as an evangelist in 1998. We feed over 150,000 meals to the poor and homeless every year. They enjoy nutritious meals in one of our classrooms, kept cool in the summer and warm in the winter The Jule Miller Visualized Bible Study Series on DVD is always playing on a large screen TV while they eat. That was the first course you paid for and sent me at Leavenworth in 1973.*

*In closing, from Isaiah 58:6-7, and my coming sermon Sunday, 'Is not this the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?'*

*This old, worthless building had only about 40 people left when I came 23 years ago. Thieves had stolen all the money and were trying to sell the property for a mere \$250,000. Who would ever have dreamed that God would use a thief to stop thieves? We were recently offered over 1 ½ million dollars for the property. Worthless? Isaiah 58:12 says 'And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places; thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, the repairer of the breach, the restorer of the paths to dwell in.'*

*I share all of this not to boast in myself. How can I? I remember clearly where I came from and what God has done with my life. Instead, I want to encourage you to continue to do God's work that is producing such fruit. How can I ever thank Joe Garman and George Faull? How can I ever give credit to whom credit is due and honor to whom honor is due? Alas, I must let God give you and all those who made*

*my education possible, your due rewards - more precious than silver and gold.”*

You see, Eagle Christian, the nest might be comfortable, but God waits for you to fly!



## Chapter 6

# LEARNING TO FLY

*“When eagles walk, they often stumble.  
They were not meant to be graceful on the ground.  
They were designed to fly, not to walk.  
And when they fly, oh, how they fly.  
So free, so agile, so charming, so lovely.  
They see from above what we can never envision from below.”*

**-AUTHOR UNKNOWN**

*The eaglet looks out over the ledge onto which he has just jumped, into the unknown heights and depths of sky and the unforgiving rocks below. He sees his mother waiting for him to flap his wings and fly, but he innately discerns that a failed attempt means certain and instant death.*

*He pauses and ponders timidly on that granite outcrop, contemplating the luxury of his aerie, even with its broken walls and bitter breezes. He considers the ledge. Though narrow, it's solid. He has never caught a current or stepped off into nothingness; he has nothing but the word of his mother that it can be done. The ruined nest beckons him back to the familiar. The eaglet is caught between settling and adventure. Meanwhile, his mother stands at the ready.*

The eaglet, timid and inexperienced, cannot understand all the risks. Neither can he fathom the elation of gliding on the wind. He is about to enter a phase in his life, like each of us, where there is no turning back. This learning process may be painful at times, but when the ordeal is over, neither eaglet nor human will ever be the same.

Remember that Jesus said, *“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world”* (John 16:33).

With or without Jesus, this world will bring trouble. I'd rather face my trials *with* Him. During the time leading up to His death, as Jesus was trying to prepare His disciples for what was to come, he said, "*Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid*" (John 14:27). Hear those words! "*Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you.*"

When someone knows they are going to die, often they will create a will. The grieving ones left behind place great stock in exactly how those dying wishes are spoken because they are the last words of someone they love and respect.

Jesus, with His departing words, spoke peace and willed it to us in a most peculiar way. He didn't say, "Don't worry – stick with me and you won't have any trouble." On the contrary, He guaranteed trouble. But He also promised peace.

His peace is different from the kind the world calls for on Christmas day in the middle of war when both sides might agree to a "cease-fire." His peace happens even as the bullets are whizzing past you and war rages. His peace is a source like none other – unexplainable (Philippians 4:7). He left it for us. It is our decision to receive it or not, just as it is our decision to stay under the shadow of His protective wing.

So, if we're to learn to soar with Him, in His will and peace, we have to step off the ledge. What a terrifying concept! But don't worry. Just like the mother eagle, Christ stays with us. He doesn't call us unto Himself and into His salvation to let us falter along without any direction. No, He is the builder and sustainer of our faith.

God is the Builder. "*For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God*" (Hebrews 3:4). Again in Philippians 1:6: "*...being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.*"

God is the Sustainer. "*Till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*" (Eph. 4:13). The wise king said, "*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this are man's all*" (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

How often I have wished that this learning process could just be over – that God would speak the answer to my questions like he did for David in 2 Samuel 2. "*It happened after this that David inquired of the Lord, saying, 'Shall I go up to any of the cities of Judah?' And the Lord said to him, 'Go up.' David said, 'Where shall I go up?' And He said, 'To Hebron.'*"

Although we may not hear an audible voice from Heaven, or even receive specific answers as David did, God still speaks through the infallible, unchanging Word. When we read it, we develop a listening ear to His Spirit. He says in Proverbs 3:6 "*In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.*" The more we read and study His

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Word, the more we will understand what God is saying to us and His answers will become more clear to us every day.

Just think of all of the mistakes and consequences we could have avoided! However, when all is said and done – the blessings and chastising, the strikes and strokes and near misses along our life roads – are designed to fashion us into becoming Eagle Christians. God is always creatively at work. The way he is forming us into Eagle Christians or “*new creations*” (2 Corinthians 5:17) is exactly the same method of operation He used to create the world.

### **DAY ONE: God turned on the light (Genesis 1:3)**

“*Darkness was on the face of the deep.*” (Genesis 1:2) God was ready to create something “*very good*” (Genesis 1:31), so the first thing He did was to turn on the light.

My dad had a workshop. He was always making something out there: a table for Mom, shelves for my girls, later an entire tree house! I watched him do some amazing things in that workshop ... but never without the lights on.

It was the same with God in the beginning. And it is the same each time he constructs a new life in each one of us. He finds us walking in darkness with little or no spiritual awareness, “*Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be*” (Romans 8:7). Those of us in darkness have not prayed to know Jesus; more often we’ve only used His name for cursing or selfish gain. Then God turns on the light to reveal who rules this present darkness. That’s when we become aware of our shadowy hearts and the lack of His shining presence.

Once the light is turned on, we can see clearly that the temporary payment sin offers might be pleasure and profit, but the wages it eternally pays are death, destruction and separation. That’s the high cost of low living. If one doubts the illuminating benefit of seeing sin as it really is, consider this story a friend told me.

He was deer hunting in Oregon when it began to drizzle and turn cold. He entered the opening of a small cave, happy to be out of the weather, and immediately began gathering leaves and sticks to start a fire. He was content in his little “hole in the cliff.” The fire gave off heat; but it also gave off light – light that revealed what was in there with him. On one ledge was a long, fat snake, and making the floor literally seem to move under his feet was a huge army of bugs and spiders. Suddenly, his warm little cave lost its appeal and he said, “No way! I’m out of here!”

That is precisely how it was with you and me before God’s light penetrated our darkness. We were comfortable in our little caves of selfishness and sin; then God turned on the spiritual light and exposed what and who were really in there with us. And He doesn’t leave us there, but says, “*Come and let us walk in the light of the Lord*” (Isaiah 2:5). As soon as we leave the darkness, we are no longer a part of it.

*“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light” (Eph. 5:8).*

### **DAY TWO: Separation took place (Genesis 1:7)**

Separation is what must happen if we are to continue walking in the light. You can't keep doing the same things, going to the same places, hanging with the same people, or running the same streets you did before and expect to remain in the Light. These things will not save you - they will destroy you. This is why Jesus said in Matthew 10:38-39, *“He who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake, will find it.”*

When my girls were teenagers and working late at night at the mall, I would caution them to never park away from the lighted areas and to always walk with someone after dark. This is good spiritual advice as well. Never walk away from God's lighted path and keep Him always with you, because Satan watches for those who stray from the Light.

To stay in the light, separation from our old path is painful, but necessary. Before sanctification there must be separation. When God gets us alone, be it by a broken relationship, affliction, disappointment, heartbreak, sickness, temptation or revelation; when He gets us absolutely alone, and we are dumbfounded and cannot ask one more question, then in our silence, we begin to hear Him speak (Job 38:3). Even though you cannot always find God on your radar screen – rest assured you are always on His.

Over my four decades of prison ministry, many prisoners have said to me, “I thank God I came to prison.” No matter how many times I hear that, it always sounds strange. They are not thanking God for the embarrassment of confinement or incarceration; they are praising Him that through imprisonment they were forced to separate from certain people, places and things that had wrongly influenced them. Several have said to me, “I was not arrested, I was rescued. Had I not come to prison I would be dead and in Hell right now.”

God knows that we must be separated from some of the friends, habits, and possessions that confine and control us. However, in our separation from the world, we are separated *to* God because nothing can separate us from His love (Rom. 8:38-39). Nothing is more essential to intimacy with God than separation from sin and nothing separates us from God but sin.

### **DAY THREE: New growth appears (Genesis 1:11)**

Spiritual growth will be evident when we begin walking in the light and separating ourselves for the service of the Lord. The great apostle Peter's last recorded challenge and command was, *“but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord*

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and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). Christian growth is a spiritual warfare fought daily and individually.

Spiritual growth is like physical growth. A baby is not born walking, but around a year or so, he naturally begins to try. It may be delightfully entertaining to watch him wobble and tumble, but in truth, it’s serious business. Only because our expectation is that the infant will eventually master this task, is it charming to watch. If there were some medical concern that suggested this child may never walk, the struggle to do so would be heart-wrenching.

The same is true with spiritual growth. We are not reborn with all innate knowledge of how to be “different than we were.” It is a process. And just like with a small child, failures are received with grace and there is growth as a result of them. But when a young or immature Christian continues to roll on the floor, making no effort to use their newfound legs, happy to stay in that state of immaturity, splashing around in the sewer of their sin and filth, it is no longer a sweet picture. “*What shall we say then? Shall we continue to sin that grace may abound?*” (Rom. 6:1).

What if the baby lay there kicking his legs, but made no effort to rise? If he decided to quit, he’d never learn to walk. Mom and Dad wouldn’t put up with that for very long. They couldn’t. The entire rest of that child’s life experience hangs in the balance. And the same is true for us. The more he works at walking, the better he becomes. When he falls, he simply takes his Father’s hand and tries again.

Faith is progressive – the more we walk in it, the stronger our steps become. The rest of our existence and spiritual experience hangs in the balance as well. Depending on how strong we allow our “faith legs” to become, will determine the great and remarkable ways God will use us.

Many of the phases of early childhood development are perfect illustrations of the growth process of Christians. Take learning to eat for example. To celebrate my daughter Stephanie’s first birthday, my wife put her in the highchair and set a chocolate cake in front of her. Stephanie grabbed it with both hands and soon had chocolate cake all over her. That was cute! But what happens when she turns 16 and is still missing her mouth? The picture is no longer funny.

And how must God feel when we have been Christians for years and are still “babes” in Christ? It becomes disturbing, wasteful, and an absolute slap in the battered, bruised and bloody face that took our stripes.

Every day is one more opportunity to make spiritual progress. In order to grow in our Christian walk, we must take daily steps; read His Word, pray in all circumstances and spend time with other Christian believers. When we allow His Spirit to fill every chamber of our hearts, “*mercy and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed*” (Psalm 85:10). Once we take those first steps and begin to grow more independent, we quickly learn that we are not free now to just do as we please; but we are free to do what pleases Him. With each step, we grow

and will no longer be eating chocolate cake with our whole face!

As we grow in faith, our love abounds toward each other (2 Thessalonians 1:3). Our love for God and the people He has put in our path energizes, exposes and measures our spiritual growth.

#### **DAY FOUR: God made two lights: the greater to rule the day - the lesser the night (Genesis 1:16)**

Now that we have found the Light, separated from the world, and started new growth of walking, talking and serving the Lord, what comes next? God gives us two great lights to guide us, one on the outside and the other on the inside. The light on the outside is the infallible Word of God (Psalm 119:105) and on the inside, the faithful Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). This great outer light points the way to real soul food - “heavenly bread” (John 6:41), “pure milk” (1 Peter 2:2), and “living water” (John 4:10). The Word shines from the outside in. The Spirit shines from the inside out (1 Corinthians 3:16). The first light will never contradict the latter, or vice versa.

David wrote, “*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path*” (Psalm 119:105). The more we walk in the Word, the brighter our pathway becomes as that Word begins to send light into the darkened corners of the places we’ve kept hidden in the dark. The more we study His Word, the clearer it becomes that sin is in the active process of trying to keep us in the dark. Sin blunts our spiritual senses. The Word of the Lord stings the tender soul. Sin covers one lie on top of another, creating layers of darkness, while the light of the Word pierces the dark nooks and crannies, obliterating the sin hidden there. The Word gives us words to live by while the Spirit “*draws men to Christ*” (John 12:32) and brings conviction. Sin renders us deaf to His call, but if our hearts are tender and tuned to the Word, the Spirit’s voice will be clear in our lives.

This example of the power of these two distinct lights is clearly illustrated in the story of Lazaro Reyes Cairo who worked under Fidel Castro in Havana, Cuba. In this regime, he had status and respect. He was responsible for a hundred men and enjoyed his high-level status with the government, where life revolved around worldly pleasures.

It was not uncommon for him to spend a series of days drunk, high and sleeping with various women. He considered himself “an active and combative atheist.” He loved to blaspheme God and debate all things religious. Like Saul before he was Paul, Lazaro enjoyed tormenting believers and propagating violence against them. In fact, the sins Lazaro *did not* commit were the exception. He boasted that he set out to violate each and every one of the Ten Commandments and regarded himself as infallible, powerful and untouchable. His egoistical and licentious lifestyle was, as he saw it, a well-deserved reward.

Lazaro treated his wife more as a slave than a spouse and was abusive to her as



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well as their children. His pleasure centered only on what he could control or possess, believing this would bring ultimate happiness. But he was not remotely happy. As his behavior became more and more out of control, Lazaro began suffering bouts of acute depression.

Seeing this, not as a spiritual issue, but a physical one, he consulted doctors, psychologists and even studied Yoga. But Eastern Mysticism and Modern Medicine failed him in his search for a “cure.” He began to fear he would lose his mind and became so desperate, that on one occasion, he sat down with a whiskey in one hand and a cigar in the other and tried to find solace in the Bible. But they were only words on a page to him. Solace was unattainable because his hardened and perverted heart blinded his reasoning and spirit. Even after scanning the Bible, he had no conviction for his sin; no epiphany of his need of a Savior. In reality, he was a violator in the extreme, living in complete rebellion - without Christ, without God and without a hope in this world. The freedom he thought he possessed – living however he wanted to live – was, in fact, the very chain that held him prisoner. What Lazaro called strength, God called weakness. His convictions, creeds, lifestyle and prejudices were all roadblocks to his actual freedom.

On August 14, 1995, God swooped in and began knocking down the barriers. Lazaro was involved in a fiery automobile accident that left him close to death, with severe burns over much of his body. He was rushed to the Intensive Care Unit in Lyuano. Doctors gave him no hope for survival and assigned a nurse to monitor his critical condition.

As Lazaro drifted in and out of consciousness, he could hear the nurse softly singing Christian songs. Led by God’s spirit, the nurse leaned over his bed and whispered, “Do you believe in God?” Lazaro nodded that he did. “May I pray for you?” Lazaro replied, “Please do!” Through that moment of vulnerability, when he was at his lowest, Lazaro finally looked up and found God reaching down.

Throughout the night the nurse was God’s mouthpiece, reading him passages from the Bible, including the entire book of Job. When the doctors made their morning rounds they found Lazaro’s condition greatly improved. During his stay in the hospital, Lazaro lived for the nightshift to arrive so he could find comfort in that caregiver’s eloquent and meaningful prayers and hear the sound of Christian songs, and learn more about Jesus. All the while, the Holy Spirit was drawing him in.

Every moment of every day for the next year, Lazaro suffered intense pain throughout his entire body. This formidable man who had directed others with absolute power had to be spoon-fed and have his diapers changed like a helpless baby. None of the men who had served under him or any of the friends who had gladly ridden his coattails in order to participate in his wild parties came to visit him. Since he was now of no use to Castro, Lazaro was reduced to the stigma of a common citizen. If Lazaro had cause for depression before this, certainly now, he would be

swamped with hopelessness. He was now in a position to be retaliated against by his wife and children, the innocents he had only ever treated with disdain and harshness. But through it all, his wife was like an angel to him, and for the first time he discovered how compassionate, kind and sympathetic his children were, in spite of the way he had treated them.

After three years of multiple and complex surgeries, doctors told him there was nothing more that medical science could do for him. He moved about in a wheelchair, but never walked again because of permanent neurological damage. Nothing about his present condition reflected the powerful man he had once been.

He lost his old life, but was about to find a new one. *“Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water”* (Hebrews 10:22). He began drinking more than ever - this time from the fountain of living water (John 4:10). Lazaro recognized his need for a Savior in the Word this time. Led to repentance by the Spirit, he asked God to forgive him of his many sins, received Jesus Christ as Lord and was baptized at the Havana waterfront for all to see.

This is the very same Spirit that descended upon Christ at His baptism (Matthew 3:16). He descended like a dove - not a crow or a vulture. He was non-abrasive and compatible with Christ in every way. Then, the picture of His purpose became clear as the wet footprints of Jesus appeared on the shore *“to fulfill all righteousness”* (Matthew 3:15).

Following Christ’s example, Lazaro became passionate about leaving footprints of his own. Linda and I were privileged to work with Lazaro during a mission trip to Cuba. We found him to be a humble and quiet man. His favorite scripture said it all, *“Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ”* (Phil. 3:8).

His heart’s desire was that his family would come to know the Christ who saved him. Just before he died, his wife and all but one of his children were baptized into Christ.

This same outer light is a guide for us all, illuminating the truth in Word. This same inner light draws us as he drew Lazaro. *“And I will pray to the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever”* (John 14:16). *“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you”* (John 14:26).

It is really a question of whether or not you like stumbling around in the dark.

## **DAY FIVE: God brought into existence all creatures great and small (Genesis 1:20)**

When we walk in these two great lights with Christ as our Lord, Savior, and

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High Priest, we become “*a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new*” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Our hearts, though they are chipped and broken, become God’s treasure chests. Even the weakest among us are “brought into existence” in Him; true heirs to His kingdom.

Even scoffers can become part of the King’s court. In 1881, Sir William Mitchell Ramsey set out on a fifteen-year journey through Asia Minor and Palestine to prove the Apostle Paul’s journeys false. Instead, Ramsey’s discoveries caused him to embrace Christianity. In 1896, he published *St. Paul the Traveler and the Roman Citizen*. The book was so compelling that many unbelievers became Christians and several leading Bible skeptics of the day turned to Christ.

Then there is Bill Corum, who was locked up in jails and prisons in ten different states. On account of his many crimes, the man rode over 2,500 miles in handcuffs, leg irons and waist chains. Bill was a \$500 per day cocaine addict. But when God got a hold of him, all that changed. Bill has been director of his own prison ministry for more than 20 years. He says, “I can’t wait to wake up each morning to see what God has planned for me.”

*“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus,”* (Rom. 8:1a)

God is in the business of creation, but He’s also an expert at renovation and redemption for all His beloved children!

### **DAY SIX: God created a complete man (Genesis 1:27)**

Once we are transformed into “*new creations,*” we become complete, not perfect, but complete -- emotionally, mentally, physically and spiritually. “*And you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power*” (Colossians 2:10).

Our hope is complete in Him. “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*” (1 Peter 1:3). Hope rules the day when Christ rules our hearts and minds. Hope is progressive and carries momentum. The more we share with others, the more we have for ourselves.

The converse is true as well. In Proverbs 13:12 we read, “*Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when the desire comes it is a tree of life.*” According to Merriam-Webster, deferred means “withheld” or “set aside”. So hope that is withheld from us, or set aside, out of our reach, can literally, according to Proverbs, make our hearts sick.

Consider, for instance, the death of a loved one. Without the *hope* of resurrection and reunion, our hearts would forever be sick with loneliness, despair and emptiness. I have often wondered how people who don’t believe in God and His promise of eternity manage.

Our peace is complete in Him. “*Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you;*

*not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid*" (John 14:27). Several times the Hebrew text refers to God as YHWH-SHALOM, which means "The Lord of peace." When we die we will enter into eternal peace. Until then, peace must enter into us, which was God's intention all along.

But even with hope and peace completed, one of the hardest acts of the heart is yet to follow: forgiveness.

Our forgiveness is complete in Him. "*In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace*" (Ephesians 1:7). You'll never stand taller than when you kneel at the foot of the cross of Christ. Freely we receive His forgiveness, setting us free to forgive others.

The power to hate or hold a grudge can strangle a soul for years.

December 7, 1941 will forever be remembered as the day when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. Over 4,000 U.S. service personnel were left dead, wounded, or missing in action.

One of those who survived Pearl Harbor was a young sailor from Chicago nicknamed Curley. After returning home from service, he became a drunk. All he could talk and think about was the loss of those men and women, friends and fellow soldiers. He vowed that if he ever met one of those Japanese pilots he would personally kill him with his own hands.

The barkeeps in his district each knew him all too well and had a good time at his expense. They would set a beer in front of him and say, "Tell us again, Curley, what you are going to do if you ever meet one of those Japanese bomber pilots." The more beer they served him, the more violent and wilder Curley's stories became.

When the war finally ended, General Douglas MacArthur, who led the U.S. military forces in Japan and was proactive about bringing Christianity to the Japanese, appealed for two things from the American churches: Bibles and missionaries for Japan. The popular general saw post-war Japan as "the beginning of a great movement toward Christianity." The Church responded with such missionary families as the Harold Coles, the Julias Fleenors, the Paul Pratts and others, some whose children and grandchildren are still serving there today.

But as positive as the opportunity appeared, statistics tell a dreary story. Mission work was extremely difficult in Japan. While Linda and I served in Korea, we would have ten to twelve people per night become Christians in our church meetings. Just next door in Japan, they were elated to have ten or twelve people a year become Christians.

They didn't have many conversions, but one of the converts they did have proved to be an Eagle Christian. His name was Captain Mitsuo Fuchida. He was none other than the very man who had flown the lead plane and dropped the first bomb on Pearl Harbor. As general commander of the air squadron, he knew the

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objective of his mission was to surprise and cripple the American Naval force in the Pacific. Not only was Fuchida the first over the target, but he was the last to leave, destroying as much as he possibly could. It was his voice that sent his aircraft carrier the message, “Tora! Tora! Tora! (Tiger! Tiger! Tiger!), indicating the success of the surprise secret mission. The destruction left in his wake boasted 20 naval vessels, including eight battle ships with over 200 planes.

After Pear harbor, Captain Fuchida had many close calls with death. He was involved in six crashes into the sea. Once, while recovering on board after an appendectomy, the ship was bombed, both his legs were broken and he was thrown into the sea. As death loomed closer than ever before, he realized that he was the sole survivor of the seven Air Commanders and the thirty- two squadron leaders who took part in the Pearl Harbor attack. With his military career over, he slipped into unhappiness and depression and was further distressed to be called to be a witness at the war crimes trials. As he disembarked from a train on his way to give evidence, he was handed a leaflet entitled, “I was a Prisoner of Japan.” It laid out the experience of a man who had been held in a Japanese Prisoner of War Camp. It described how he was cruelly treated and spoke of his overwhelming and violent hatred of the Japanese guards. It went on to share that Bibles arrived one day at the camp. Its message of love and grace and forgiveness became relevant to him right then and there in his cell and he accepted Jesus. His heart and attitude toward his captors changed too – from hatred to love and concern.

As Fuchida read the account, he was brought to his knees by the story and by his desire to know this Jesus. And know him he did.

In 1954, Captain Fuchida came to America and conducted evangelistic efforts in many of our larger cities, pleading with Americans to give their lives to Christ. He started in California and worked his way eastward toward New York.

As his much publicized tour drew closer to Chicago, Curley’s friends at the bars would laugh and say, “Tell us again Curley, what you are going to do when you meet Captain Fuchida. He will be here in just a few days.”

Curley’s face would redden as he went to great lengths describing what he was going to do to the man he had pinpointed in his own mind as personally responsible for the deaths that continued to visit him in his nightmares.

On the night that Fuchida spoke in Chicago, the auditorium was packed to capacity with standing room only. In the middle of the front row sat Curley.

The master of ceremonies came out holding a pilot’s logbook in his left hand. “This is the logbook Captain Fuchida used during the raid on Pearl Harbor.” Then he held high an open Bible in his right hand, “This is the Holy Word of God that declares in its final chapter, “*And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.*” Pausing to let the audience think about that verse he then said,

“‘Whoever’ includes Captain Fuchida.” A solemn hush fell over the assembly.

The Japanese pilot walked out and took his stand beside the podium. Some applauded while others gasped, not knowing how to react or respond. Then the master of ceremonies pointed down to Curley and said, “Curley, would you come up on the platform?”

In shocked silence and disbelief the people watched a most amazing and surprising thing happen. The former U.S. sailor who had, for years, in his heart been a prisoner of war even after it was over, walked up onto the platform and stood next to Captain Fuchida. The master of ceremonies said, “Curley, is there something you would like to say to this audience tonight?”

Curley stepped to the microphone and said, “Yes, there is.” He looked over at Captain Fuchida and back at the audience, and with much emotion in his voice he said, “Last Sunday night I was baptized into Christ. God has taken every dark part of my heart, and I have dedicated the rest of my life to telling people about my wonderful Lord.”

Then Curley turned and stood face to face with Fuchida for the very first time. Curley extended his shaking hand in friendship and said, “Tonight, I have come to welcome my Christian Brother, Captain Fuchida, to the great city of Chicago.”

Curley the sailor had met Jesus the Savior. Sworn enemies were now united as brothers.

Our desire is complete in Him. “*Who have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You*” (Psalm 73:25). Worldly desires are nailed to the cross of Christ that was formed from two beams. The vertical beam points to God and symbolizes His love coming down to us; the horizontal beam depicts that love flowing through us in both directions to others.

Remember the verse in Proverbs about how hope deferred makes the heart sick? Now look at the second half of the verse, “but when the desire comes, it is a tree of life.” When the desire comes? What exactly does this mean? Well, in Psalm 37:4 we hear, “Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart.”

Too many times, people have interpreted this verse to mean God is some kind of genie. If we love him and try hard to live for Him, he gives us whatever we want. We have only to look at the lives of the apostles and other great spiritual pillars of faith to know this is not the case. If you are truly delighting in God, earthly prosperity is not first and foremost on your list. The desire of your heart, if it is wrapped up in God’s heart, is not for material comforts above all else.

Now, before I get letters about poverty mindedness, please don’t misunderstand. It is perfectly fine to have money – lots of it, in fact. Money, after all, is a big part of what makes my ministry able to reach out to prisoners around the world and evangelize in countries that are desperate for God’s promises. The difference is that

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money is a tool, not the main desire of your heart. If God has blessed you financially and you belong to him, the desire of your heart will be to use your gifts to further his kingdom, as well as living your life. The crux of the matter is your desire, not the bottom line in your bank account.

So what then does he mean when the Psalmist says, “He will give you the desires of your heart?” I believe it is about the dreams, passions and gifts he places within you. Some people have a desire to lead others in worship. Some people have a desire to be on the mission field. Some people have a desire to serve with children. Some people have a desire to bless others with their financial gifts. Do you see? He literally places our desires within us. Now take that a step further to the desires we have that have nothing to do with where we might serve in the church or kingdom.

In 1 Samuel, we read about Hannah, whose most fervent desire, the desire of her very heart, was for children, but she was barren. Her husband tried to comfort her, saying, “*Why do you weep? Am I not better than ten sons?*” But this desire wasn’t something Hannah had conjured up in her own mind or spirit, the desire had been given to her by God and her husband would not be a fitting substitute for a God-given passion. We know the story goes that Hannah promised her first born son to be given to God all of his days and that God gave her Samuel who ended up being one of the greatest of God’s prophets. God, in his infinite wisdom, placed that desire in Hannah’s heart, knowing her child would be Samuel, his beloved prophet.

### **DAY SEVEN: God rested (Genesis 2:2)**

Once we are complete in heart, mind, soul and strength, and we are able to recognize and rejoice in God’s sovereignty, then we can truly rest in the realization that we are simply the branches and He is the vine. He can do with us as He wills. Jesus said, “*He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing*” (John 15:5). May He find us fully feathered as His new creation, bearing fruit and going forth to fly!







## Chapter 7

# FAILURE AT FIRST

*“The mother eagle wrecks the nest to make her fledglings fly,  
But watches each, with wings outstretched and fierce maternal eye.  
She sweeps if any fail to soar and lands them on the crag once more.*

*So God at times breaks up our nest lest, sunk in slothful ease,  
Our soul’s wings molt and lose the zest for battle with the breeze.  
But ever waits, with arms of love to bear our soul’s all ills above.”*

**-AUTHOR UNKNOWN**

*The eaglet hops to the edge of the ledge and looks at the craggy rocks jutting out from the mountain below him. He doesn’t yet have a lot of life experiences, but instinctively he knows that if he falls, it’s a matter of life and death.*

*He fixes his eyes on his mother, but nervously dares a stolen glimpse of the plummeting depths. Her amber eyes are penetratingly sharp and call him back to attention, relaying the message – “Trust me.” He hops a little, flaps his wings, and then looks back at his mother. Her message is the same. He flutters again those foreign appendages that previously served only as a cloak of warmth. They seem to have taken on a life and purpose of their own, but can he trust them? Mother eagle takes small flight patterns as if to say, “Look at me. Do as I do. I know what you are capable of becoming. Try your wings again. A whole new world awaits you. You can do it. Just trust me.”*

Perhaps the most quoted verse in the Bible that mentions eagles is this one: *“But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.”* (Isaiah 40:31)

Waiting upon the Lord is a lot like being that young eaglet, peering out over the ledge and wondering what happens if you trust “mother eagle.” It’s easy to say in

our hearts, “If only I knew how it was going to turn out – it would be so much easier to trust your plan, God.” But God has an answer for that: “*‘For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,’ says the Lord. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts’*” (Is. 55:8, 9).

Waiting patiently upon the Lord is one of the most difficult things we as Christians are asked to do. It is like being asked to jump off the ledge into the great unknown with only His word that He promises never to leave us. The ground beneath our feet feels so secure. The plans we can make in our human minds seem so clear and wise to our own hearts. The possible consequences of following him (out into the wild blue yonder) are terrifying because we can’t see how it will end. The plan is not ours, but His.

Often, during times of uncertainty or turmoil, our hearts are closer to God than others because we feel the need for Him more. God doesn’t relish our torment, but he relishes our nearness. He relishes the opportunity to show us that He has been there all the while, waiting on us to lean on Him. It is so easy to look away from the peace in His presence and see only the dangers and problems. This will always be the case as long as we live in these fleshly bodies. Sometimes we have mountain top experiences in our lives and at other times we find ourselves walking through the valley of the shadow of spiritual death and doubt. But regardless of how deep and dark those pitfalls become, God’s wings are there, and He is ever waiting to bear us up once again.

Wesley Tuttle, a country singer from southern California, experienced such a spiritual updraft. He wrote and made famous the #1 country song of his day, “Detour, There’s a Muddy Road Ahead.” But, by his own admission, he temporarily took a detour away from God.

One Sunday afternoon he was sitting in his living room relaxing, when one of his little twin daughters came running into the house. She shouted frantically, “Daddy, Daddy, sister won’t talk to me!”

Wesley ran to the back yard to find his little girl floating face down in the swimming pool. Try as he might, he couldn’t restore breath to her lifeless body. He scooped her up in his arms and ran to the house, crying so hard and blinded by bitter and blurring tears, that he couldn’t find the back door. One thought kept running through his mind: “The only way I am going to see my daughter again is in Heaven, and there’s no way I am going to Heaven living the way I am living.”

Did God cause the death of Wesley’s daughter? No! Did God work through this tragedy to get Wesley’s attention? Absolutely! God watched over Wesley the same way that a mother eagle looks at her eaglet while he is perched on a craggy cliff and hopping around helplessly – nearby, ever ready to assist, always certain, and completely concerned.

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Wesley became fully aware that he had no control over the tragic situation or the experience to handle its grievous outcome. He felt terrified and alone. All the while, the Lord made slow, certain circles above his beloved child, sending him messages of strength and love, assuring him that He could fly higher than Wesley could fall.

Through this tragedy, Wesley returned to the Lord. As soon as he could fulfill his performance commitments and recording contracts, he left the bar scene and became a full-time Christian music evangelist. I had the privilege of working with him in a citywide evangelistic campaign in Garden City, Kansas.

One night I preached “The Way of the Eagles” sermon. Afterward, Wesley told the audience about the loss of his daughter. He concluded by saying, “I now realize that God was simply fluttering over me with His powerful wings in order to get me to look up and surrender my life to Him. Because of His gift of life, I will have all eternity to enjoy her.”

Why is it that too many times it is only when crisis or tragedy strikes that we suddenly feel God’s presence in our lives? God is not morbidly attracted to calamity. He’s always near, through good times and bad. We just don’t look to Him for answers as much during the good times. Psalm 18:2-3 says, *“The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised; so shall I be saved from my enemies.”*

Notice the word-picture here: “my Rock and my Fortress.” There is reason for connecting the two. A solid piece of granite provides a great wall of safety. The eagle is not alone in choosing rocks and crags along mountainsides for his home. Many ancient people embraced these hard and rugged places as homes because of the protection they offered. Jesus is that “Rock” for us according to Psalm 18. He is impenetrable, unyielding in His strong defense for us. He stands against the destruction of our souls, which Satan plans for us. The advantage of such a rock-solid protector is again pronounced in Psalm 91:1-4, *“He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in Him I will trust.’ Surely he shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the perilous pestilence. He shall cover you with his feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge; His truth shall be your shield and buckler.”*

The mother eagle does not take her eaglet to lower ground for training so he’s more comfortable. Neither does she remove all risk. Instead, she assures him she is always there with him and for him, as he learns what he needs to know to become mature. Her presence lends confidence, peace and security. God promises the same to us. *“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 4:7).

The Apostle Peter learned, after his denial of Christ (Matthew 26:69-75), that tragedy doesn't always strike without cause. He gave calamity permission and a license to wreck havoc in his life. After promising he would never deny Christ, and after chopping off the ear of the servant of the high priest and after, Peter opened the floodgates for self-incrimination. In turn, he would suffer from accusations and likewise be dealt a most painful blow.

It's easy to read the accounts recorded for us in scripture and not give much thought to the fact that these were actual people caught up in the drama of everyday living. A closer look at Peter will help to better appreciate the second chance he received and the peace that was offered when he needed it most.

Peter's given name was Simon Bar-Jonah. The Greek word *Bar* means "son of." So he was Simon, the son of a man named Jonah; but Jesus always called him Peter. He was born in Beth-sadia. *Beth* means "house" in Hebrew, and *sadia* means "fisherman." Therefore, it is no small wonder that he should one day grow up to become a professional fisherman, having been born in the house of fishermen.

Here's another interesting twist. *Beth* coupled with *lehem* renders the name of the town Bethlehem, the birthplace of Christ. The ending *lehem* means "bread." How beautiful that He who would become the Bread of Life to feed the spiritually starving masses of this world should be born in "the house of bread." When the One born in Bethlehem called for Peter to follow Him, the Man from the house of bread won over the heart of the man from the house of fisherman!

From the first time Jesus called him away from his boat and family to follow him, Peter's life remarkably and forever changed. We can't even begin to imagine the things he saw and heard! And in addition to the miraculous signs he witnessed, he would hear Christ say, "*Your sins are forgiven.*"

As a Jew, Peter knew one person could forgive another when they were personally sinned against. But when the sins were against God, only God could forgive those. It could mean only one thing! Christ had to be God who "*became flesh and dwelt among us*" (John 1:14).

After living with Jesus day after day, it seems that one would be insulated from Satan, not caught off guard by anything he would throw their way. Surely, nothing could shake their faith. After all, Peter was the one in Matthew 16:16 that first confessed, "*You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!*" And Jesus responded to his good confession of faith with great affirmation.

*"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven"* (Matthew 16:17-19).

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The evening that the disciples accompanied Jesus to Gethsemane, the garden of prayer, Peter was as loyal and determined as he had ever been. Just hours before in the upper room, he assured Jesus that he would never betray him.

But the word Gethsemane means “olive press.” In that place they crushed the olives to extrude their juices. That night, in Gethsemane, Christ experienced overwhelming pressure as He prayed over our sins and the cross He soon would bear. And Peter felt the great force of stress and distress as well. Drops of blood flowed from the brow of Christ and teardrops overflowed the eyes of Peter like olives in a press.

Jesus had removed Himself about a stone’s throw away from His trusted disciples. He lay prostrate on the ground and began to pray. Three times Christ came back to the place where He had left His disciples, and found them sleeping. How heavy his heart must have ached; how much He loved and needed them! Each time He said, “*Rise and pray! Rise and pray! Rise and pray, lest you enter into temptation.*” (Luke 22:45-47) And each time they would rise and begin to pray, only to fall asleep again. I wonder if Peter realized at that point that he was already betraying his Lord.

It was about the midnight hour when “*Judas, and a detachment of troops, and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, came there with lanterns, torches, and weapons*” (John 18: 3). They had come to arrest this One who had hurt absolutely no one. Since it was dark in the Garden of Gethsemane and they wanted to be sure to arrest the right person, Judas Iscariot told them he would give them a sign – “*Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize Him*” (Matthew 26:47-49). When they came marching into the garden, Jesus walked out to meet them.

His arms, his hands, and perhaps His garments were soaked with blood and sweat. I personally believe that His face was so covered with blood-sweat that Judas had to reach out and wipe away the crimson grime in order to give Him the kiss of betrayal. He wiped away the blood, as if it meant nothing.

When Judas kissed Christ, Jesus called him friend – “*Friend, why have you come*” (Matthew 26:49-51)? I would have screamed, “Fiend!” But Jesus whispered “Friend.”

Jesus was giving Judas an opportunity to repent for his traitorous act. He offered him an opportunity to turn away from spiritual destruction; but Satan had already entered into Judas. After kissing Christ on the cheek, Judas disappeared into the shadows -- his body into the pitch of night, his soul into everlasting darkness.

Jesus, the Light of the World, stepped toward the horde and asked them, “*Whom are you seeking*” (John 18:4)? “*They answered him, ‘Jesus of Nazareth’*” (John 18:5). Jesus clarified his identity, using the same Hebrew title that Jehovah God had used on Mount Sinai when Moses asked Jehovah, “*‘But Whom shall I say, O Lord, has sent me? What shall I say to them?’ And God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ And He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM’ has sent me to you’*” (Exodus 3:13-15).

When Jesus responded to the question of the arresting party with the self-proclamation, “*I AM HE*” (John 18:5), at the very mention of His name the entire throng “*drew back and fell to the ground*” (John 18:5).

Peter was there; he witnessed the whole thing! He watched as one after another of his friends and loyal followers of Christ, fled in fear. When the angry mob pressed in to seize Jesus, Peter hastily brandished the small sword he used for scaling and filleting fish and swung at the one closest to him. The victim’s name was Malchus and he was a servant of the High Priest. Malchus ducked and Peter sliced off his ear. This tells me that had Malchus not ducked, Peter would have done more than slice off his ear. He was going for his head! Jesus bent over, picked up the ear, and put it back on Malchus’s head, restoring it in such a way that it seemed to have never been severed.

That was the last miracle Jesus performed before He died – and that miracle was for Peter and Peter alone, though I’m sure Malchus was pretty grateful too! Had Christ not redeemed Peter’s foolish act, there may well have been four crosses on Calvary’s hill instead of three.

Jesus turned to Peter and said, “*Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me*” (John 18:11)? In great humiliation, shame, and no doubt, confusion, Peter returned the blood stained knife back into its leather pouch and watched as Jesus willingly extended His hands. They bound Him like a common criminal and led Him away to Jerusalem for an illegal nighttime trial.

Scriptures reveal that Simon Peter followed afar off in the darkness. Soon, Peter was to also slip away spiritually, consumed by the blackness of anger, confusion, doubt, and fear. His boldness while standing next to Jesus soon would cower in the presence of a mere teenage girl.

Peter followed the throng of captors and the captive to the home of Annas, “*the father-in-law of Caiaphas who was high priest that year*” (John 18:13). Annas was wealthy and owned a rather large estate with a spacious courtyard at its center. The sprawling property sat next door to the temple. He built it there so he could keep an eye on the temple treasury.

A town crowded with thousands of extra visitors for the Passover, burgeoned with pockets of restless travelers, filled the darkened streets. The dropping evening temperatures drew some of these strangers to gather around charcoal fires in the courtyard. By the time Peter extended his trembling hands toward the warmth, several dozen others had assembled to do the same. He soon realized that from where he stood near the firelight, he could still see Christ as He faced his prosecutors on the porch above. While Jesus stood trial, Peter cozied up to the fire of temptation, far removed from the One who never failed him.

A servant girl he had never met pointed across the flickering fire and shouted, “*You are not also one of this Man’s disciples, are you*” (John 18:17)? Suddenly

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every eye was on Peter; every head turned. All hushed conversation ceased. Time moved in slow motion while his heart rapidly ticked like a bomb within his tightening chest. His mind raced to justify the lie forming on the tip of his tongue. Satan dug his hooked finger deep into Peter's heart as the disciple heard his own voice spew shocking words from between his lips, "*I am not!*" (John 18:17).

Jesus had unashamedly proclaimed, "*I AM HE.*" Peter had said, "I am not."

At Peter's adamant reply, everybody resumed their jeering and scoffing for the man on trial. But Satan perceived Peter's weakness and persisted with his nefarious torture. Another girl shouted, "*This fellow also was with Jesus of Nazareth*" (Matthew 26:71). And Peter denied Christ again, replying with even more vehemence, "*I do not know the Man!*" (Matthew 26:72). This time the words rolled more quickly and harshly over his tongue.

Ashamed and terrified, Peter bolted toward the front gate only to be confronted by another group of courtyard loiters. At this point, Peter realized what he was doing. His instinct was to run from it, but you cannot run from the choices you make. They, and their consequences, become a part of you. Satan saw Peter trying to run as well, but he wasn't finished with him yet. Even as Peter strained to still see Jesus from this distance, one among the group, kin to Malchus, demanded Peter's undivided attention. He pointed to Peter and said, '*Did I not see you in the garden with Him?*'" (John 18:26). Panic gripped Peter. He lifted his head toward God's holy Heaven, and in the sight of the Lord and all of His holy angels, Peter bellowed defiantly, "*I do not know the Man!*" (Matthew 26:74). Then he sealed his denial with a terrible oath and vile curse against God.

When the echo of his rebuff stopped reverberating off the iron gates and stone walls, he heard the startling crow of a rooster. I have to imagine that, unheard by Peter, Satan was laughing as well. What a night for him! Christ was on trial and one of his most loyal followers had denied him. Satan, no doubt, was feeling utterly victorious at this moment. Peter was feeling lower than the dirt beneath his sandals.

Where typically the call of a rooster signaled a new dawn, this time his blaring squawk indicted Peter into darkness. There was no dawn of new light for him. No sun breaking over the darkness of the night. His soul was darker than it had ever been before. Peter instinctively looked toward Jesus, only to find Christ looking back at him. In shame Peter turned and charged out through the gate.

I can imagine the thoughts that must have raced through his mind as Peter scrambled away. When he passed the huge stones lining the pathway, he must have recalled the Lord's warning that if man did not praise him, the rocks would cry out. Perhaps Peter cried regretfully, "If this rock had a tongue, if this rock had a mind, if this rock had a will, it would be proud to stand up and confess its Creator. I have all three and used all three to deny that I even knew the man. Oh, Lord, what's wrong with me?"

Instead of praise, Peter used his tongue to deny that he ever knew Jesus! He made a choice to renounce his dear friend. And with his will, he determined to have no witness for Him.” Earlier Peter had stood before the assembly and said in front of all the disciples, “*Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!*” (Matthew 26:35) Before that bold statement, he had also proclaimed, “*Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble*” (Matthew 26:33).

Peter stood sobbing, coming to terms with the horrible fact that he had denied his friend and Lord, not once, but three times in the course of a few minutes!

The Bible doesn't tell us where Peter went after that, it only says, “*So he went out and wept bitterly*” (Matthew 26:75). But I've often wondered if he didn't go back to the garden of prayer. If maybe, in the moonlight, he got down on his hands and knees and found the place where hours before, Jesus had sweat drops of blood. There would be no falling asleep this time as he prayed over and over again, “Oh God! Please, give me a second chance ... a second chance, Lord ... a second chance!”

Perhaps he was still praying in the morning light when he heard the voices of the angry mob shouting over and over again, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” Peter may have longed to be brave and make up for his shame. Perhaps he envisioned himself boldly marching back into the sunlit courtyard from where he slinked away in darkness the night before. Maybe he saw himself standing resolutely right next to Jesus and defending him profusely. But his visions were obliterated by Satan's haunting, accusing voice that held him far from Jesus' side, “You hypocrite! Don't add injury to insult! Haven't you done enough damage to this man already? At least have enough common decency to stay away on the day of the man's crucifixion!”

Peter eventually must have mustered some courage and moved nearer. By then, it was too late. He heard his friend call out from the cross, “*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani* (My God, My God, why have You forsaken me)?” And within his accused and guilty heart, Peter heard something different: “Simon Barjonas! Simon Barjonas! Why have *YOU* forsaken Me?”

What a concession speech he must have prepared to take to the others. “Men, you can take my name off your list of disciples, because I quit; I'm finished. I am not worthy to be called a disciple! I'm going back to the Sea of Galilee and don't you dare try to find me.”

But when he got to the upper room and reunited with his friends, he found that not a single one of them had been faithful to Jesus. Every one of them had betrayed and deserted Him ... every one, that is, except John. John accompanied Jesus right into the house of Annas. John stayed with Jesus throughout the illegal nighttime trial. John stood before Christ while He hung on the cross of Calvary. When Jesus, while on the cross, expressed concern for His mother, John took responsibility for her. Only one disciple remained faithful.

The Sabbath came the next day, and with it, more questions than answers. How



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were they to explain to Jesus' followers that He had died on a Roman cross? It was a curse for a person to die on a cross. Not only was the one who died cursed, but his family and friends also.

And who was this Comforter that Jesus told them would come and lead them into all truth? Would it be someone from among the group that Jesus would supernaturally raise up? Would it be someone from outside the group? And how would they recognize this person when they met him?

They were trying to work out in human terms something completely out of the natural realm, all the while clinging to their safety, folding their wings tightly and seeing only a frightening fall. And God soared above, circling and watching, planning His acrobatic, miraculous maneuver that would raise the dead and raise up fearless witnesses.

Then came the third day - the first resurrection Sunday morning. Mary came bursting into the upper room shouting, "He's alive! He's alive!" She breathlessly reported how the other women along with her had arrived at the tomb early in the morning and found the huge stone rolled away! Mary described the gleaming angel sitting on the stone and shared the angel's great declaration, "He is not here, but is risen!" She heeded his challenge, "*But go, tell His disciples—and Peter—that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you*" (Mark 16:7).

Shocked and suddenly hopeful, the men and women in that room surely stood with mouths gaping and eyebrows raised in response to the message they just heard. Though Peter listened intently, his heart nearly stopped at the sound of two simple words, "and Peter." Oh, what those words must have meant to Peter at that moment. I wonder if his wings didn't flutter a bit and if Peter didn't begin to believe he had found the courage to step off the ledge and take flight. Then again, he may have shuttered with regret and pondered whether facing the Jesus he denounced was better than returning to his shattered nest.

Peter's uncertainties would be partially laid to rest after Jesus appeared and breathed into his disciples the promised Holy Spirit. But on one special occasion, Peter intimately received the tender forgiveness the Lord knew he needed. The fisherman met again with the Man from the house of bread – this time over breakfast on the beach.

*"Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together. Simon Peter said to them, 'I am going fishing.' They said to him, 'We are going with you also.' They went out and immediately got into the boat, and that night they caught nothing. But when the morning had now come, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Then Jesus said to them, 'Children, have you any food?'*

*They answered Him, 'No.'*

*And He said to them, 'Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will*

*find some.’ So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish.*

*Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, ‘It is the Lord!’ Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment (for he had removed it), and plunged into the sea” (John 21:2-7).*

That boat could not paddle fast enough for Peter to get to Him!

There had been countless other days by other seashores where the disciples would start their day with Christ preparing breakfast. As they ate together, He would teach and laugh and prepare the disciples for their next adventure. Peter thought he would never experience again the company of this Man nor that joyous fellowship. Yet, here he sat with His Lord! His happiness must have consumed every thought... until the curling smoke of the charcoal fire and the crackling embers triggered a haunting memory of that night in the courtyard of Annas!

Jesus motioned Peter to the side. With his head bowed, unable to look into Christ’s penetrating eyes, he felt the Lord’s hand on his shoulder as He said, “‘Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?’ He said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.’ He said to him, ‘Feed My lambs’” (John 21:15).

Then Jesus bent and looked deeply into his eyes and said, “‘Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?’ He said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord. You know that I love You. ‘He said to him, ‘Tend My sheep’” (John 21:16).

The third time, Jesus tenderly touched Peter’s shoulder again and asked, “‘Simon son of Jonah, do you love Me?’” It must have taken all the control Peter could muster as he lifted his head toward this resurrected, Holy One and insisted from the depths of his heart, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.”

*“Jesus said to him, ‘Feed My sheep’” (John 21:17).*

Three times Peter had denied Him. Three times Christ gave him opportunity to make it right. What a relief! No matter how many times we stumble and fall, God gives us another chance.

I’ve read commentaries and heard opinions expressed in Sunday school where people thought Jesus was sort of “sticking it” to Peter. Did Jesus have to ask him three times? Wasn’t he rubbing it in? NO! Jesus knows our hearts and understands what un-reconciled guilt will do to a life. Jesus was giving Peter the opportunity to erase all three denials, not because Jesus was keeping count, but because he knew Peter was. He allowed Peter to confess three times his love and devotion to Him because He knew Peter needed to say it three times to His face.

What an incredibly loving God we serve. He didn’t take this opportunity to tell Peter how hurtful his words had been. Christ didn’t use the moment as a way of driving home the point that Peter was supposed to have been his friend. Neither did he remind him of his many vows of loyalty. Instead, he was thinking of Peter – of Peter’s heart.

## Failure at First

Peter was no stranger to the dangers, difficulties, perils and pitfalls of life. But through it all, even when it was so dark he could not see to take another step, he knew God was there. If there was ever going to be a time that Christ said, “That’s it Peter– I’ve had enough, I give up on you,” it would have been that morning by the Sea of Galilee. Instead He offered grace.

God looks for opportunities to show you that same kind of faithfulness and forgiveness. He longs to bring you up to soar with Him at new heights.

Paul assures us, “*And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose*” (Romans 8:28). “*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*” (Romans 8:38-39). Jesus has promised, “*I will never leave you nor forsake you*” (Hebrews 13:5).

“*Therefore ... 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*” (Hebrews 12:1-2).

Once as I was leaving an Indiana prison, I noticed a sign hanging overhead. I think it stuck with because so rarely do I see a message of hope in a prison. It said, “THE GREATEST FAULT IS NOT IN FALLING – THE GREATEST FAULT IS IN NOT GETTING BACK UP.”

The Lord is watching over us just as the mother eagle’s eyes are on her eaglet. Should you stumble and fall – and by the way, you will – He’s there to swoop in and catch you, and say, “Let’s try that again.”

### HE’S ALWAYS THERE

*“If I descend to the lowest hell,  
Sharp and strong his presence soars;  
If I ascend to the highest heaven,  
He is there.*

*If I hide on the highest mountain,  
With eagle’s eyes, He’s ever watching  
If I sink into the deepest sea,  
He hears my prayer.”*

–JOE R. GARMAN





## Chapter 8

# DENYING YOUR EAGLE POTENTIAL

### THE KING OF THE SKIES

*“The eagle, above all other birds, knows who he is.  
He is the king of the skies. He never shrinks back  
when he smells a storm approaching;  
He never ducks his face under a great-feathered wing  
when the wind gets strong.  
He is the eagle.”*

**-ANONYMOUS**

*An ancient fable tells of a man who found an eagle’s egg and put it in the nest of a barnyard hen. The eagle hatched with the brood of chicks and grew up with them. All his life, the eagle did what the barnyard chicks did, thinking he was a chicken. He scratched the earth for insects and worms. He cackled and clucked. And occasionally, he would thrash his wings and fly a few feet into the air, but only a few feet – as chickens do.*

*Years passed and the eagle grew very old. One day, he saw a magnificent eagle circling in the cloudless sky. It glided in graceful majesty among the powerful winds with scarcely a beat of its strong golden wings.*

*The old eagle looked up in awe and said, “What is that?”*

*“That’s an eagle, the king of the birds,” said his neighbor. “He belongs to the sky. We belong to the earth – we’re chickens, you know.”*

*So the eagle lived and died a chicken, for that’s what he thought he was.*

God is calling to some of us right now, pleading with us to see ourselves as the eagles we really are, but our heads are bent over in the barnyard, completely entrenched in our “chicken-hood.” Jeremiah 29:11 says, “‘For I know the thoughts that I think toward you,’ says the Lord, ‘thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give

*you a future and a hope.”*

To take hold of the future and hope that God has given us, we have to be willing to let go of the past. Some of us, like that misplaced eagle, will deny our eagle-hood, never understanding to Whom we belong; never reaching our potential, but scratching endlessly at the ground beneath feet that were never destined to be planted there. We will admire from a distance the adventures and accomplishments other Christians have made on God’s behalf. All the while, we’ll settle and miss the call to be the Eagle Christian God desires us to become.

God’s plans for us are exciting and impacting, but we have to take to the skies if we are to allow Him to teach us to fly. Let me share with you a few stories of Eagle Christians who were less even than chickens when they started out. Through God’s Word and the leading of His Holy Spirit, their lives were saved to serve others.

Clyde Vernon Thompson, a minister’s son, never went to church with the rest of his family. He would get up early on Sunday mornings and stay out hunting all day only to come back late at night to avoid facing his mother and father. The church tried to make excuses for his bad behavior, but in the end that’s all they were . . . excuses. Clyde’s excuses would soon take him down a very dark path.

One Sunday afternoon, while out hunting, Clyde killed two men in the woods. The year was 1928 and he was only 17 years old. After his arrest, and while awaiting trial, he was nearly lynched by vigilantes. He survived only to be placed on death row in Huntsville, Texas. At 19 years of age, he was the youngest death row prisoner in Texas history.

Neither this terrible claim to fame nor the experience itself got his attention. In fact, Clyde vowed that his killing streak would not stop just because he was in prison. While incarcerated, he murdered two more men. He developed such a bad reputation that in 1938, correctional officers took him off death row and locked him in a concrete bunker located behind the prison facility. This particular bunker also served as a morgue with six stone slabs where they would lay bodies after execution.

Prison officials had the slabs removed and a steel door put on the morgue, into which they cut two small openings. One slot provided access for his food tray and the other was a four-inch square for air. Because the morgue was set between two taller buildings inside the prison walls, sunlight could only penetrate the morgue for about six hours each day. Clyde would later write, “For 18 hours each day it was so dark inside the morgue that I could not see my hand before my face.”

For security reasons, he was stripped to his underwear. Hour after hour and day after day he would pace back and forth, ranting and raving inside the morgue like a wild animal or a possessed man. If a guard came too close to the morgue, Clyde would curse and try to spit on him. But Clyde Thompson was not insane . . . he was just full of evil!

As the years passed, Clyde became known as “the meanest man in Texas” and

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his heart became even darker than the hellhole in which he lived! This is the point in the story where we hope to read that the prison chaplain visited Clyde and introduced him to Jesus, but that is not the case. Even the prison chaplain steered clear of him and was quoted as saying, “He is a man without a soul!” But if there is one thing I have learned in over four decades of prison ministry, it is that God has His people everywhere; sometimes in places you would least expect to find them. One day, a correctional officer approached the morgue and said, “Clyde, you don’t have anything to read in there. I’ll bring you a Bible if you promise not to tear it up.” Out of boredom, Clyde replied, “You’re right. I don’t have anything to read. I guess I would take a Bible.”

During the six hours of daylight available to him, Clyde would read the Bible. When it got dark, he would work to remember what he had read. Without realizing it, he was actually memorizing and meditating on the Word of God. No evangelist or pastor came to minister to him. He had nothing but the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit to teach him about “*the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes*” (Romans 1:16).

You cannot memorize and meditate on the Word of God without becoming convicted in your spirit. Either you are going to change your lifestyle, or you are going to throw the Bible back through the prison bars. When divine intervention reaches the heart, it can overpower the mind.

As God’s Word soaked into the very marrow of Clyde’s heart and soul, he began to change. Officers took notice and would discuss their observations among themselves. Eventually, his behavior became so changed, Clyde was transferred back to death row where he was baptized into Christ. During the years he spent there, he baptized eight fellow death row prisoners. He made such an impression on the prison administration that they finally moved him to the general population where he became the chaplain’s assistant.

As Clyde’s heart changed, so did his circumstances. His death sentence turned into a stay of execution. His stay of execution turned into life in prison. Then, in 1963, Governor John Connally gave him lifetime parole. Upon his release from prison, Clyde went straight to the Lubbock County Jail, but this time as a volunteer rather than an inmate. It was there that he began a series of chaplaincy programs. He remained faithful to his Lord and to his ministry until his death in July of 1979.

Clyde Thompson will go down in God’s record book as one of the greatest soul winners of his generation. The meanest man in Texas led literally hundreds of men, women, boys and girls out of the trenches of alcoholism and away from the dead ends of drug alleys and crime, to the foot of the cross of Jesus Christ. Clyde Thompson, formerly shackled by man, but through Christ was set free to soar as an Eagle Christian, became an inspiration to us all.

Some of God’s greatest messengers start out mean. Some start out indifferent.

My wife Linda and I were missionaries in Korea when we started our first prison ministry in 1969. We were newlyweds and didn't have much money. Often, we did without so we could print literature for the inmates and purchase Bibles.

We found a tremendous response for Christian literature in the prisons. On one occasion, when I had an extra large box of Bibles, the prisoners rushed forward in such mass that they almost mobbed me. Correctional officers had to come between us and use their nightsticks to force them back.

Then one of the guards took a Bible and threw it across the room and into the far corner. Prisoners would jump on it and fight over it like hungry dogs on a bone. He would laugh and throw a Bible into the other corner, and the scrambling and scraping would start all over again. I shouted, "No, this is not the way to distribute the Holy Word of God."

We finally established order and persuaded the prisoners to form a line. I announced, "Don't worry. Everybody is going to get a Bible." But the moment I started distributing the Bibles, the line broke and it was total chaos again.

In the confusion someone even took my personal study Bible. I remember thinking, "Why would they want that? It's in English."

One day, a correctional officer escorted us all the way to the front gate. He whispered, "Do you have any more Bibles for our prisoners? I'll see to it that they are given to those who need them most. And do you have more gospel tracts?" Linda and I emptied out our van and gave him everything we had for the sake of the gospel.

Sometime later, on the streets of Taejon, I met a missionary friend, David Merwin, who had a concerned look on his face. He said, "Brother Joe, you are passing out far too many Bibles in the prisons. Don't you know what the prisoners do with them?" I smiled hesitantly. What else would they be doing with them but reading them? David continued, "The Korean prison system does not provide toilet tissue for the prisoners. They are using your Bibles and Christian literature for toilet paper."

I was shocked and sickened when I heard those appalling words! I said, "No, that's not true! I can't believe it!" I left that very spot where we were standing and went straight to the maximum-security prison in Taejon, and started questioning guards and prisoners to find out if this detestable and disgraceful report held any validity. I was disappointed, discouraged and downhearted when the claim was confirmed. That night I told Linda, "I have entered my last prison. We will no longer live like paupers in order to furnish them with toilet paper."

But Isaiah 55:8-11 states, "*For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.*

*"For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed*



## Denying Your Eagle Potential

*to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.”*

There was a devout Buddhist prisoner inside Taejon Prison named Mr. Kim. He, like the others, had a Bible he used for toilet paper. One day, he began reading the “toilet tissue.” The page he ripped out of the Bible and held in his hands was from 1 John. His eyes focused on Chapter 1, verses 5-9, *“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.”*

Mr. Kim was an honest and sincere seeker after truth. He later wrote, “1 John taught me that God’s chief attribute is not love, but holiness. I want a God like this - a Holy God who is able to meet my every need. One who promises joy unspeakable, and One who will never leave me nor forsake me.”

Mr. Kim had torn up a considerable portion of his Bible. He consulted other prisoners, but they too had only fragmented sections of their Bibles left. He smuggled a letter out of prison urging me to come and visit him.

I fear my name should have been “Joe-nah” instead of Joe, because I did not want to go. It was only out of respect for God that I entered that prison again. I was still angry with the prisoners and staff.

Mr. Kim pleaded, “Brother Joe, just one more Bible, please. Please, just one more Bible. I will not tear it up.” Reluctantly, I gave him another Bible. It turned out to be one of the best things I ever did.

Upon his release from prison, Mr. Kim became a security guard for a local Bible College in exchange for his lodging, meals and tuition. The last I heard of him he was serving as a missionary in South America.

*“Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,” Says the Lord of hosts”* (Zechariah 4:6).

One doesn’t have to travel across the world to see God’s penetrating power at work in the hearts of people. Jesse was a “good man” who lived in a small town in Oklahoma. He faithfully drove his wife to church every Sunday morning in his pick-up truck, but would not go inside. Instead, he sat outside in his truck until services were over. He didn’t even go inside the church building on Christmas or Easter.

Although Jesse chose to distance himself from the assembly, everybody still loved him. Before and after services, young and old congregants would approach

his truck window to greet and visit with him. Despite the hospitality and friendship shown him, Jesse maintained no interest. Because he'd never shared his heart with them or acquiesced to her invitation to join her at church, no one could have guessed the depths to which his wife filled his heart and mind... until she died.

Jesse visited her grave every day. His distress over losing his life-long companion continued to grow until it consumed him. Two weeks after his wife passed, he took his pistol to her gravesite, pressed the barrel to his chest and pulled the trigger. What happened next was nothing short of a miracle. The bullet entered his chest, hit a rib, and ricocheted out his side without ever hitting a major organ. The impact knocked Jesse backward causing him to lose two things: his glasses and the gun.

A man, washing his car a few blocks away, heard the gunshot, jumped in his car and rushed to the graveyard to see what happened. He found Jesse lying in his own blood. Jesse groaned, "Give me one of two things. Either help me find my glasses so I can get my gun, or hand me my gun so I can finish the job."

After a few days in the hospital, Jesse returned home. Church members stopped by to visit him every day, cleaning the house and bringing him food. Jesse would occasionally ask them about the faith of his wife. During all those years, he had not even talked with her about her personal beliefs.

Minister Jack Adams, a skilled wood carver, became a frequent and welcomed guest in Jesse's home. As Jack whittled, he would patiently and without judgment answer questions Jesse had about Christianity. As God's words given through Jack and other faithful Christians took root in his heart, Jesse began to raise his head from the dirt of the proverbial barnyard and gaze at the sky where he belonged. A few months later, he soared as the eagle God made him to be when Jack baptized Jesse into Christ.

The first thing Jesse did was purchase a fifteen-passenger van and began driving up and down those red clay roads picking up the Native American children who lived along them and taking them to Sunday school. Every Lord's Day, without fail, he and his van full of children were inside the church building worshipping the Lord.

Before he passed away, Jesse had several occasions to give his testimony. He always ended the same way. He would shake his bowed head, and with tears streaming down his cheeks say, "Oh, the wasted years – the wasted years."

One of Jesse's most prized possessions was a cup and a cross, honed from a single piece of wood that Jack carved and gave to him. Jesse would point to it and say, "This tells my story. It speaks of the cross that I rejected for so long, and portrays the cup that Christ drank so I could have unity with Him. Oh, the wasted years."

Sometimes the Lord will use a softened heart like Jesse's to share His Good News; other times He will use a "simple" mind. One of my most memorable experiences of seeing how the Lord perpetuates His Word occurred in the city of Oriel, Russia.

Appropriately enough *Oriel* means, "eagle." A small nucleus of believers in-

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vited us to assist them in establishing a church there. Barbara Barger, a good friend and gospel singer from Tulsa, Oklahoma, accompanied me.

We did our best to attract the interest of the Oriel residents. We printed handbills, ran newspaper ads, recorded radio announcements, and rented an auditorium. But we failed to understand the deep mistrust the people had of Westerners and the fear that still clung to them of what might happen to them if the wrong person learned of their interest in what we had to say. On the first night only about 100 people showed up. You could have put them all in the first three rows. The second night wasn't much better. We bathed the situation in prayer, but it remained depressing and exhausting. It seemed as if everything we tried failed.

On the third night, several of us arrived at the auditorium a couple of hours early and began handing out invitations on nearby street corners. A mentally challenged man approached me, his speech so befuddled that even my Russian interpreter had a hard time understanding him.

He finally conveyed to us that his name was Nicholas and that he wanted to help hand out invitations. Several objected because they didn't know how the people would receive him. But we had so few people and so many handbills that I thought, "What can it hurt?"

We had plenty of leaflets left over when we started our services that night so we left them with Nicholas. Throughout the service, he kept coming into the auditorium, leading one person and then another. Later that evening, we noticed he had a female partner working with him. She turned out to be his wife, and she was also mentally challenged. He had recruited her for the work of the Lord.

By week's end our attendance had more than doubled to an average of 280 people. Jesus taught to first "*make disciples*" and then baptize them (Matthew 28:19), so we spent the entire week preaching, singing, teaching and testifying about Christ. Then, on the final night, we hoped for a harvest. We prepared an ARM baptistery, provided baptismal gowns and assigned people to receive those who would be coming forward. Only two people came down the aisle -- Nicholas and his wife.

How much they comprehended, I do not know. Our interpreter tried counseling them the best he could. Finally, he turned to me and said, "They insist on becoming Christians." I replied, "I certainly will not deny them that privilege."

Staff members departed behind the curtain to help them change into the baptismal gowns as Barbara sang of God's love reaching down. Suddenly, the Spirit of the Lord convicted me to extend a second invitation to accept Jesus.

"This is the final night," I told those in attendance. "There will be no services tomorrow evening, no gospel songs, and no more invitations. God's invitation is always open, but this will be the last one from us."

Thirty-seven people came forward! Some chose to be baptized with Nicholas and his wife. Others requested extra counseling. Heaven rejoiced, Hell mourned,

and angels watched in holy silence.

Nicholas and his wife were among the last to leave the auditorium that night. I said to them, "You have already led 37 people to the foot of the cross." He smiled, reached into his pocket and pulled out a little red plastic rooster. He handed it to me and said in Russian, "Remember . . . pray."

If you visit my office in Joplin, Missouri, you will see the little memento prominently displayed on my bookshelf; it's one of my most prized possessions. That little red rooster helps me remember a mentally disabled couple so open minded and perceptive that they heard and received Christ's invitation to baptism and life with Him, and in the process, brought 37 more into the amazing presence of Jesus.

Isaiah 1:18 pleads, *'Come now, and let us reason together,' says the Lord, 'though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.'*" Don't you love being told you are forgiven?

David wrote: *"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered"* (Psalm 32:1). The gift of forgiveness produces humility in the receiver. Humility makes it possible to fellowship with God because we learn our position in relationship to His holiness and understand the need for Christ as Intercessor. We enter the kingdom of God by placing complete trust in Jesus Christ, our redeemer from sin. To recognize Him and submit to Him as Sovereign Savior and Lord over our lives is to have our filthy garments of sin washed clean by the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:14). We are not called to build this Kingdom - but to ENTER it!

From condemnation to salvation! From degeneration to regeneration! This is the theme of both the Old and New Testaments. The road to heaven is soaked with the repentant tears of both simple-minded men and great thinkers, and the blood of the saints as well as the sacrificial blood of the Lamb.

The saints and the Savior are the ones John beheld when he envisioned *"A great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'"* (Revelation 7: 9, 10).

In heaven, John witnesses the ones who soared on earth by laying down their lives. They were eagles indeed. Their white robes are testament that they did not live as chickens. I also want to die an Eagle Christian, don't you?

Only one time in the scriptures did Jesus ever refer to a group of people as being like chickens. In Matthew 23:37 He wept, *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!"* Christ was speaking to a group of people who would neither hear His cry nor heed His call. They were earthbound, unable to lift themselves or others any higher.

## Denying Your Eagle Potential

The highest a chicken can go is onto a low-lying limb of a tree or to the top of a squatty chicken coop. If it falls, it doesn't fall far and no one notices the dull thud when he tumbles. But when a soaring eagle plummets to the ground, many eyes will turn to watch his tragic, spiraling tailspin.

So it is with Eagle Christians. When a person who has never tried to live for Christ does something wrong in the community, no one says much about it. His or her sinfulness produces a dull thud and no one notices. But let a man or woman, boy or girl, who boldly took a stand for God commit the same wrong, and everyone shouts, "Hypocrite, look at what he said he was and look at what he did." "Hypocrite, look at who she claimed to be and what she really is." Not many eyes behold the chicken when it falls, but many will be transfixed on the crash of an eagle.

When one among us does fall, let us never forget that we are all human beings; men and women who love, who cry, who fear, who hope, and who will be spending eternity somewhere. When life becomes warped or completely destroyed, it is simply an opportunity for God to enter the situation, and through His divine love, heal bruised relationships and mend broken hearts.

It sounds as if it would be easier to live as a chicken and avoid the watchful eyes of those who would condemn. But God promises so much more to those who take the risk and are willing to separate from the safe earthbound flock and soar to great and glorious heights with Him. He provides the steps toward soaring so that you need not worry about crashing.

*"But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble" (2 Peter 1:5-10).*

If God has provided the purpose, the plan and the power for us to soar, why would we ever want to settle for anything lower? In his poem, "A Stuffed Bald Eagle," Henry W. Shoemaker paints a vivid picture:

*Suspended by a dirty string in a dingy, downtown store;  
With wings widespread a stuffed bald eagle hangs.  
And as summer breezes blow, filth-laden through a small window;  
The regal bird, which once did soar above the clouds, above the storms,  
Swings gently round and round.*

What a sad picture. A bald eagle stuffed and hung just high enough that any teenage boy with a mind to could jump up and swat at its great feathers, sending it

circling helplessly on its string. How grieved God must feel when He looks down on us and sees us so easily dangling within sin's reach as Satan swats at us, playing with us, sending us in little circles. All the while, God is offering us flight.

God designed, conditioned and commissioned the great eagle to soar the skies. In just the same way, you and I have been sanctified (set apart for a spiritual purpose). But far too often, we are only a poor imitation of what he has called us to be -- stuffed with cares and distractions, bad habits and tired tendencies, and tethered to the world. Don't let Satan and sin clip your wings because a Christian without wings is a Christian without dreams! Until we surrender to God and grow real feathers for flight, we will always be frustrated in our Christian life. Better to welcome your all-wise, heavenly Mentor to teach you to fly!

Don't deny your eagle potential. Receive Christ's forgiveness and extend it to those around you. Love in ways you never thought you could. Step out in faith and do things you never thought you would. Only then, will you be able to stop living as a chicken and begin soaring with the saints.



## Chapter 9

# SAFELY ABIDING IN SPIE OF THE STORM

*“Above all other birds it is the soaring eagle, with its size and weight, that gives the most abiding impression of power and purpose in the air.*

*It advances solidly,  
like a great ship cleaving the swells and thrusting  
aside the smaller waves.*

*It sails directly where lesser birds are rocked  
and tilted by air currents.”*

—EDWIN WAY TEALE

*The eaglet begins to lose weight as Mother no longer drops morsels directly into the nest. His hopping makes him more limber and the combination renders a lighter and quicker fledgling. He musters the courage to pursue the parent circling just out of reach and in small attempts, for brief moments, he becomes airborne.*

*Without any previous experience of his own, he merely imitates what he’s witnessed his Mother do in front of him time and time again. He instinctively spreads his wings and struggles to reach upward. Coasting on a current of wind, he glides across the valley and topples onto land. Unhurt but still hungry, the effort is rewarded as his mother drops the enticing food to the eaglet as a hard-earned prize. Then she escorts him safely back to the nest.*

Some of us adapt quickly to being borne on God’s wings as He takes us in flight, inspiring us with courage and spiritual insight. Others of us, after all the enduring, the falling and the flying, become weary at heart and simply want to take shelter beneath His wings. In times like these, the eagle will escort her eaglet back to her nest and in effect say, “You are tired now. I will hide you with my wings, pro-

tect you from the foe, and shelter you from the storm. The nestled eaglet will never hear the storm raging beyond the shelter of his mother's wings. He has felt the hard side of the wing; now he feels only the soft, warm feathers.

God's wings are prepared to shelter all who seek refuge in Him. God plays no favorites. He does not shelter only the great or wealthy. Resting in Him is a touch of heaven. Sir Thomas Moore wrote, "Earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot heal."

During those times that earthly sorrow or turbulence is buffeting my faith, I remind myself that I am safe from this world and whatever Satan has planned for me. Sometimes I use my spiritual vision to picture the presence of His angels all around me.

So many times I have sat in foul and filthy jail cells ministering to the incarcerated and focused on the fact that I was not alone; angels were in that cell with me. That knowledge gives me great inspiration and strength to do a better job in presenting the Word of God. I try to never forget that we are not in this without heavenly help.

Angels are "ministering spirits" and are mentioned almost three hundred times in the Bible. The first description of an angel appears in Genesis 16:7, the last in Revelation 22:16. The angel is portrayed in the beginning as carrying a message from God, and in the closing chapter of scripture as carrying a message from Christ. Because God shows no favoritism, neither do His messengers. They are sent to the great and small by order of the Most High.

An angel visited the very first Gentile convert, a military officer. "*About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, 'Cornelius!' And when he observed him, he was afraid, and said, 'What is it, lord?' So he said to him, 'Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God'*" (Acts 10:3-4).

Angels have been found ministering to prisoners. "*But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, 'Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life'*" (Acts 5:19-20).

Of course, little children are guarded and guided by angels. Jesus lovingly spoke of children seven times (the number of completion) in Matthew 18, the children's chapter of the Bible. "*Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels see the face of My Father who is in heaven. For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost*" (Matthew 18:10-11). The list is long, but these few examples show the diversity of those God has chosen for angels to visit. Here are some more interesting facts and reassuring reminders about these companions commissioned by God.

## ANGELS PATROL THE EARTH

They are the "real" God-squad. "*And the man who stood among the myrtle trees answered and said, 'These are the ones whom the Lord has sent to walk to and*



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*fro throughout the earth.’ So they answered the Angel of the Lord, who stood among the myrtle trees, and said, ‘We have walked to and fro throughout the earth, and behold, all the earth is resting quietly’” (Zechariah 1:10-11).*

## **ANGELS SURROUND THOSE WHO FEAR GOD**

*“The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them. Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him!” (Psalm 34:7-8).*

## **ANGELS COMFORT AND STRENGTHEN**

*“Then an angel appeared to [Jesus] from heaven, strengthening Him. And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luke 22:43-44).*

## **ANGELS WERE THE FIRST TO ANNOUNCE THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD**

*“But the angel answered and said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come; see the place where the Lord lay’” (Matthew 28:5-6)*

## **ANGELS ARE NOT ALWAYS RECOGNIZABLE**

Only seraphim and cherubim are mentioned in scripture as having wings, and never does scripture mention that angels have halos. *“Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels. Remember the prisoners as if chained with them – those who are mistreated - since you yourselves are in the body also” (Hebrews 13:2-3).*

## **ANGELS WERE CHARGED TO GUARD JESUS IN ALL HIS WAYS**

This is why they are mentioned more in the Gospels and Revelation ... because where Jesus was; the angels were - en masse. *“For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone” (Psalm 91:11-12).*

## **ANGELS ARE IN CONSTANT WARFARE AGAINST SATAN AND HIS AGENTS**

Sometimes they are mentioned as driving chariots of fire pulled by a horse. *“Then Elisha prayed and said, ‘O Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.’ And the Lord opened the servant’s eyes and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha” (2 Kings 6:17).*

## IN GREAT GLORY ANGELS WILL RETURN WITH JESUS

*“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord”* (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

## ALL ANGELS WILL BE PRESENT AT THE JUDGMENT

*“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats”* (Matthew 25:31-32).

Like the baby eaglet, we are in the best of company! Yet we are cautioned to not misplace our devotion or dependence.

## ANGELS ARE NOT TO BE WORSHIPPED

*“Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God”* (Colossians 2:18-19).

Jesus promised Someone even greater to his disciples in John 14:26, *“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.”*

He has promised to be there with us ... always – even in the midst of the storm. We live in a tough and tumultuous world. There’s no denying it, but we are not alone. Angels attend and the Holy Spirit indwells. But never forget, it is in Him that we safely abide.

Each individual has the choice to welcome God’s Holy Help. We operate on free will down here and we like it that way. But when someone else’s free will inflicts pain or betrayal or even death into our lives, we quickly want to turn on God and demand that he answer the age-old question: “Why?”

Free will is a double-edged sword. We appreciate it when it works to our advantage, but as soon as it causes us pain, we want to blame God. God doesn’t plan the evil that afflicts us, but He will walk through it with us and provide our spirit a way out of the darkness which Satan hopes to introduce through it. And He will always – ALWAYS – use it for His glory.

When Robert and Betty Stam arrived in China in November of 1934, there was legitimate concern about possible persecution. Real danger was present. Acts of

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violence against missions had made front-page news when, in 1932, communists massacred eleven missionaries in Sian. Just two years later, they were told that communist activity had diminished. The local magistrate assured them that there was “no danger of communists” in the area and guaranteed their safety. Other mission stations in the province were also convinced that the region was reasonably safe.

One of the Stam’s sponsoring congregations in Indiana approached them with alternative choices, such as ministering to the Chinese in New York or San Francisco. Robert and Betty flatly rejected their suggestions. They said, “God has called us to China and to China we shall go.”

While on the ship bound for China, the skipper good-naturedly teased Robert. He said, “Mr. Stam, you talk as if you can convert all of China. Do you really believe that you can convert all of China?” Robert Stam replied without hesitation, “No, but God can through me.”

In December of 1934, only one month after they arrived, communist soldiers attacked the home they were using for a church and mission station. Chinese government officials had seriously misjudged the safety of the situation.

John, Betty, and their only daughter, three month old Helen Priscilla, were placed under heavy guard. Soldiers tore the white cross from the roof and threw it on the ground. They then urinated on it and kicked dirt on it until the mud completely obliterated the pure white paint.

The guerrillas grabbed Robert, dragging him out into the village street. Pressing a bayonet to his throat they commanded, “Mr. Stam, deny your faith or die.” Robert replied without hesitation, “How can I deny the One I have given my life to serve?”

They then brought out Betty and Helen. They said, “Mr. Stam, deny your faith or your wife and daughter will die slowly before your very eyes.” Imagine the horrible scene as this family knelt in the middle of that dark street.

Chinese Christians were rounded up to witness the event. The commandos shouted, “Pray to your God, Christians! You will soon see that He cannot save them.”

The Chinese Christians reported that it seemed as if, for a few seconds, all the creatures in the jungle were silent as their beloved missionaries stared into each other’s eyes. Even baby Helen had a semblance of peace as she cuddled in her mother’s arms.

The Stams were taken to the city of Tsingteh and held hostage for several days in an attempt to secure a twenty thousand-dollar ransom. When no money was paid and no effort made to rescue them, they were stripped of their outer clothing and paraded from village to village. At the urging of the soldiers, townspeople came out in full force to ridicule them.

Guards discussed killing little Helen so they would not have to bother with her on the long and grueling march. Helen’s life was spared, and one week later she was

delivered, in a rice basket, to the home of another missionary family over one hundred miles away. A Chinese evangelist had found her abandoned in a house some thirty hours after the Stams were executed.

To many people back home in the States, it was a sad waste of two young lives. Some took opportunity to say, “We warned them not to go.” But the martyrdom of the Stam’s became the battle cry of the underground church in China.

*“When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, ‘How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’ Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed”* (Revelation 6:9-11).

Although this was a distressing blow to a Chinese church already struggling with disappointment and discouragement on every side, it did more to strengthen and unify the underground church than any other single incident. Chinese Christians were inspired and stimulated to become “native evangelists.”

Thousands paid the ultimate price the book of Revelation speaks about. *“I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement”* (Revelation 17:6).

Betty’s Bible was found and returned to the China Inland Mission in Shanghai. On the inside cover she had written: My Plea – by Betty Stam: “Lord, whether through living or through dying, use me for your glory.”

Also in the Bible was the last letter written by Robert Stam. It read:

*“My wife, baby and myself are today in the hands of the Communists, in the city of Tsingteh. All our possessions and stores are in their hands, but we praise God for peace in our hearts and a meal tonight.*

*Things happened so quickly this a.m. The Lord bless and guide you, and as for us, may God be glorified whether by life or by death.*

*In Him – John C. Stam”*

The Stams showed us how to live ... then they showed us how to die. *“Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints”* (Psalm 116:15).

*“He found him in a desert land and in the wasteland, a howling wilderness; He encircled him, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye. As an eagle stirs up its nest, hovers over its young, spreading out its wings, taking them up, carrying them on its wings, so the Lord alone led him, and there was no foreign god with him”* (Deuteronomy 32:10-12).

In this great song of Moses in the book of Deuteronomy, we see a glimpse into

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the heart of God as He describes how He found Israel and provided His loving care for her. He emphasizes that He alone was their God and there was no other. In the life of the Stams and all of their Chinese Christian brothers and sisters who followed in their agonizing, but glory-filled footsteps, God remained present.

As a mother eagle stirs up her nest to persuade her young ones to fly, so God allowed troubles to develop in Egypt so that Israel would be willing to leave. God allowed persecution in China so that many would come to believe!

You are also “the apple of His eye.” We need to daily pray as David did in Psalm 17:8 *“Keep me as the apple of Your eye; hide me under the shadow of your wings.”*

David overcame the hurts of life by praying about them. He knew God was able to turn setbacks into stepping stones, to safely abide in spite of the storm.

But we do not have to go back to 1934 or to Old Testament heroes to find such faithful “golden apples” of God. One of the greatest modern day stories of conversion and ministry occurred only a few short years ago in Cambodia.

I began working there in 2001 with Solka Seth and his wife, Mom. Solka and Mom did not have two coins to rub together, yet they, along with their three daughters and son, started a church on Koh Kor Island.

Koh Kor had been a “prison island” for women during the scourge of Pol Pot (1975-1979), Cambodia’s ruthless dictator. Tens of thousands of women were led captives to Koh Kor, only to be tortured and killed at the hands of the dreaded Khmer Rouge. On the island, near where the Memorial Christian Church now stands, is the killing tree where the soldiers would execute the women’s children.

According to Paul Chesser, a special correspondent for *The Heartland Institute*, “Pol Pot became the de facto leader of Cambodia and set about to create an agrarian utopia, a purely peasant society achieved through the elimination of all individuals who showed evidence of wealth or an education. The Khmer Rouge divided families and drove them far from their home provinces. Executions, malnutrition, slave labor, and displacement all resulted in the death of approximately two million Cambodians – or over 20 percent of the population.”

When Pol Pot’s reign of terror finally ended, a number of the women had no families or homes to which they could return, so they remained on the island that eventually became known as “Woman’s Island.” When I first visited the island there were only about 40 women and 120 children living there. It remains primarily a government refuge island for women who have nowhere else to go.

Each time I visited the island, I would hear more about the horrific days and pain-filled nights of the “killing fields.” These “Daughters of Pol Pot,” a name given them by the Khmer Rouge, would tell me how the women were forced to kneel and pray at the moment of their execution to show that God could not save them. The soldier would then hit them in the back of the head with a hatchet to save money on bullets.

When Pol Pot's bloody regime finally ended, missionaries were allowed to re-enter the country, along with a flood of Cambodian refugees who had fled to neighboring countries to escape persecution. Thousands had become Christians during their exile, and house churches began springing up throughout the region.

One of the returnees was a young man named Christopher LaPel, who lost his mother, father, brother, sister and several other relatives and close friends during the Khmer genocide. Christopher began conducting Christian Leadership Training Conferences in Cambodia. Never, in a thousand years, could he have imagined what God had in store for him. The preacher was about to meet the persecutor!

Christopher was conducting a seminar at Chamkar Samrong village in Battambang province when he walked Khang Khek Ieu, whose revolutionary name was Duch (pronounced Dook). The man returned time and again to hear Christopher's teachings. Christopher had no idea his newest disciple was the notorious leader of the Khmer Rouge secret police who personally oversaw its prison camp system.

At the close of the conference, Duch approached Christopher with a request. He said, "I am a sinner. The crimes I have committed against men, women and children are dark and deep. My regime's motto was, 'To keep you is no benefit. To destroy you is no loss.' I targeted many Christians. Now I want to become one. It's OK what they do with my body as long as Jesus has my soul. Please baptize me."

"When I first met him he was a person living in darkness and sadness; with no joy and no love. After his baptism I began to see him become a completely different person," said LaPel, who immersed Duch in a Cambodian river in 1996.

Following his baptism Duch returned to his village in Northwest Cambodia and started a church. He continued preaching the gospel until he was eventually arrested and incarcerated at the ECCC detention center. There is no doubt that Duch's conversion and commitment to Christ played a major role in his capture.

In an article written by Dean Smith for *Assist News Service*, Christopher LaPel is quoted as saying:

*"Duch's remarkable transformation is a powerful testament of the work of Jesus on the cross. Paul said we are 'justified by faith' (Romans 5:1). The word justification does not mean, 'to infuse with righteousness;' rather it means that you are declared not guilty because there is no evidence to condemn you – 'just-as-if-I'd' never sinned.*

*Paul explains in 2 Corinthians 5:21, 'He (God) made Him (Jesus) who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.' At the moment of salvation, all of Duch's acts of torture and murder were transferred onto Jesus so that God no longer has any record of this sin. Though Duch will be found guilty of all charges in the earthly trial, he is acquitted of all charges in the heavenly.*

*In fact, Paul wrote, 'where sin abounded, grace abounded much more' (Romans 5:20). Where there is great sin, there will be more than enough grace to cover*

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*it. I was shocked when I found out who he really was because he was so evil. I had to personally come to grips with the issue. I hold no anger toward Duch. His leadership has encouraged me. I have completely and unconditionally forgiven him. He is a man of God.”*

The Cambodian-American pastor who directed Duch to Christ met, prayed, and studied the Bible with him several times since his 1999 arrest and testified during his trial. I believe you will agree with me that Christopher LaPel is indeed a modern day Eagle Christian.

“But wait a minute!” I can hear you saying. “You called this chapter ‘Safely Abiding.’ Why are you including these stories in this chapter?” Because neither God, nor I want you to be a Christian who believes that as soon as you confess Christ, He will automatically protect you from all bad experiences. If you’re in the Word, you’ll quickly see this isn’t true. God cares far more about your spiritual well being than He does your physical life. In that sense you are the apple of His eye, and He is your Shield of Protection.

- Genesis 15:1 - *“After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your **shield**, your exceedingly great reward.”*
- Deuteronomy 33:29 - *“Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD, the **shield** of your help and the sword of your majesty! Your enemies shall submit to you, and you shall tread down their high places.”*
- 2 Samuel 22:3 - *“The God of my strength, in whom I will trust; my **shield** and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge; my Savior, You save me from violence.”*
- 2 Samuel 22:31 - *“As for God, His way is perfect; the word of the LORD is proven; He is a **shield** to all who trust in Him.”*
- 2 Samuel 22:36 - *“You have also given me the **shield** of Your salvation; Your gentleness has made me great.”*
- Psalm 3:3 - *“But You, O LORD, are a **shield** for me, my Glory and the One who lifts up my head.”*
- Psalm 5:12 - *“For You, O LORD, will bless the righteous; with favor You will surround him as with a **shield**.”*
- Psalm 18:2 - *“The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my **shield** and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.”*

- Psalm 18:30 - *“As for God, His way is perfect; the word of the LORD is proven; He is a **shield** to all who trust in Him.”*
- Psalm 18:35 - *“You have also given me the **shield** of Your salvation; Your right hand has held me up, Your gentleness has made me great.”*
- Psalm 28:7- *“The LORD is my strength and my **shield**; my heart trusted in Him, and I am helped; therefore my heart greatly rejoices, and with my song I will praise Him.”*
- Psalm 33:20 - *“Our soul waits for the LORD; He is our help and our **shield**.”*

God compares the Christian life He’s promised to shield, to a physical life with which we are most familiar in Matthew 18:4 and 1 Corinthians 13:11. The passages remind each one of us of the long, slow process from infancy to maturity. As a baby, we take one or maybe two steps, fall down, and sometimes even hurt ourselves. Eventually, we can take several steps without falling. Later, we can go all the way across the room. Next we perfect running, jumping, and even walking backwards ... by practicing over and over again until at last we get it right!

That’s also the way we grow in Christ. Hebrews 5:13 says that when we first become Christians we are “babes.” We are not mature Christians. We are going to make mistakes. We are going to trip and fall and hurt ourselves and possibly others. But we must not become discouraged. We must refuse to say, “I cannot do it. I give up.” Instead, let us say, *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”* (Philippians 4:13). Persistence + Prayer = Power. *“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”* (1 John 1:7). Never doubt in the dark what Christ has promised you in the light.

This is not to say you will eventually get to the place where you will never sin or never question God’s presence and plan for your life. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:12, *“Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.”* Mature Christians will quickly tell you that the Christian life is a constant growing process. We never get to that place where we can say, “Now I have attained. Now I am THE Christian.” Instead, we are continually growing.

Everyone stumbles, everyone falls, everyone sins (Romans 3:23). 1 John 1:8 says, *“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”*

Sin is strong and it is wrong. It will cost you more than you are prepared to pay, take you farther than you had planned to go, and keep you longer than you ever intended to stay. Romans 6:23 warns, *“For the wages of sin is death.”* But sin is more than just spiritual death; it destroys your heart, mind and strength as well.

This is why, like the mother eagle, Christ challenges us to fly a little higher each



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time. And when we fail, or start to lack confidence in our faith, He escorts us back to the ledge to “try again.” Our doubts and questions do not surprise Him. He sees the end while we cannot, and that is what He meant when He said to Thomas, “ ... *because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed*” (John 20:29).

Safely abiding, in spite of the storm – that’s where and that’s when we grow.





## Chapter 10

# WAITING ON THE LORD

*“The rocks below are jagged, but the current’s soft and still,  
The eaglet yearns to leave the nest and test his newfound skills.  
With wings that only learned to spread and catch the wind below,  
The eagle jumps from safety’s ledge into the great unknown.*

*Mother Eagle watches, with sharp and searching eyes,  
For any danger lurking in the darkly pre-storm skies.  
Her eaglet isn’t yet aware of what awaits beyond,  
So she will glide behind him and bring him safely home.”*

**–ANGELA BROWER**

*Now that the eaglet has tested his wings, he is eager to go diving to the water below and pluck a fish like he has seen his mother and father do, but he waits impatiently instead. Before Mom can make the dinner delivery, his discipline wanes and he impetuously lifts his wings to take flight and fetch the food himself. Immediately, a large, dark shadow settles upon him and as he timidly glances over his shoulder to determine the source of the looming shade, he catches a chastising look only a mother can make. Her eyes seem to say, “I told you to wait!”*

As mentioned before, one of the most famous passages of scripture that refers to the eagle is found in the book of Isaiah. You’ll find the poetic words engraved on plaques and embellishing bookmarks. It’s a favorite for those facing trials or sickness because of its powerful, strength-imparting message. *“But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint”* (Isaiah 40:31).

Stop and think about what Isaiah is saying. If our faith is in the Lord and our trust does not falter, regardless of what Satan throws at us, we can rise up and over

clouds of temptations and trials with the wings of a mighty eagle. But first we must endure the exercise of faith and perseverance and patience – the part nobody likes!

The Lord exhorts us to wait patiently upon Him for answers to prayer (Psalm 40:1-3). Patient prayer produces blessings (Isaiah 64:4), courage (Psalm 27:14), daily necessities (Psalm 145:14, 15), help (Psalm 103:5, 6), His goodness (Lamentations 3:25), instruction (Psalm 25:4, 5), justice (Isaiah 26:8, 9), protection (Psalm 33:18-22) and salvation (Psalm 27:1, 2).

We are to continually keep our eyes focused upon Him (Psalm 123:2), reflect His mercy (Hosea 12:6), stand confidently on His promises (Psalm 130:5, 6) and trust Him in the darkest valleys (Psalm 23:4). When we “wait upon the Lord” He rewards us with gladness (Isaiah 25:9), hope (Psalm 146:5), integrity and uprightness (Psalm 25:21), joy (Psalm 33:21), peace (Psalm 37:9-11) and freedom from shame (Psalm 25:3). Waiting time is never wasted time.

*“I waited patiently for the Lord; and He **inclined** to me, and **heard** my cry. He also **brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps. He has put a new song** in my mouth – praise to our God; many will see it and fear, and will trust in the Lord”* (Psalm 40:1-3, emphasis added).

God **inclined** toward Jacob in Genesis 18 and **heard** Moses’ cry in Exodus 32. He **brought** Jeremiah **out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay** in Jeremiah 38. God **set** David’s “feet upon a rock” in 2 Samuel 22, He **established** Simeon in Luke 2, and **put a new song** in the mouth of all creation in Psalm 148. God desires to do the same for you!

A man who did not wait patiently for the Lord was King Saul; and it cost him his kingdom (1 Samuel 13). Israel had become “an abomination” to the Philistines so they gathered together to fight with Israel. Saul rallied his troops and waited for the prophet Samuel. But as time dragged on, Saul’s men got restless and started to scatter. The Word says that the troops who remained were “quaking with fear.”

Now here’s where I see Saul as that little eaglet on the ledge. He was pretty confident by now that he had this whole “burnt offering” thing under control. I’m sure in his own mind he justified it to himself, saying, “Samuel isn’t here and doesn’t see how dire this situation is. If he knew, he would have been here by now! It’s his fault, not mine. So I’m going to have to do his job for him!”

Saul grew impatient and offered the sacrifice that only a prophet was allowed to perform. Then just as Saul completed the offering, Samuel arrived and said, “What have you done? The Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever.” What a price to pay for lack of patience!

We can learn a lot about composure, endurance, patience and “waiting” from the eagle. Eagles have been observed sitting on the same perch for hours at a time scanning the horizon, not because they are lazy, but because they don’t need to

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waste energy searching for food. With the sharpest eyesight known to man (5 to 7 times keener than the human eye) they can secure food at will. Eagles are confident in their God-given abilities and possess a capacity and willingness to persevere.

Jesus said it best. *“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be*

*My disciples”* (John 15:5-8). In order for you to “abide” in him you must first relinquish your wants and wills and “**wait** upon the Lord.”

At first glance these verses seem easy enough, but they get deep fast. Upon closer examination we discover they actually hold the key to our Christianity becoming fun again. Once we realize that we are just branches and He is the vine, and that it is not up to us to bear fruit but rather for Him to bear fruit through us, then we can rejoice, relax and rest in Him.

Remember how exciting and enjoyable Christianity was when you first came to Jesus? When did it begin to lose its luster somewhere along the way? The thrill first begins to wane when we start to question God’s leading and involvement in our lives. The joy dissolves when we enter into a legalistic approach and dogmatic relationship with the God who longs to be lovingly connected.

Until we adopt and adapt the attitude of “the branch” mentioned in John 15, we will forever be disappointed and frustrated in our Christian walk. Stop trying to *affect* God and begin to *reflect* Him. Relax. Enjoy yourself in Christ. Remember, *“We love Him because He first loved us”* (1 John 4:19). We serve Him, not in an effort to persuade Him to do something for us, but because of what He has already done for us. You are not to be “a thermostat that dictates” to God, but “a thermometer that displays and reflects what God is doing in your life.”

When you align yourself correctly with Christ, with Him being the vine that provides spiritual life and insight, so many of the jigsaw puzzle pieces of Christianity are going to fall into place for you. You will be able to read and understand His Holy Word better and the blessed Holy Spirit will be able to reveal the deeper truths God wants you to understand and apply. You can begin now by grasping the meaning behind this holy instruction: *“Abide in Me, and I in you”* (John 15:4). It means to strive in every way to live for Him – not in an attempt to influence Him to love you more, but because He already loves you. You are His child and He is your Savior.

Some Christians live defeated, discouraged and dysfunctional Christian lives because they are consistently trying to be someone in Christ that they are not. They are like apple trees trying to grow pears. Or, they are like unhappy fishermen surrounded by bluegill, but they want to catch bass. They have never come to grips

with the fact that they are called to grow and bear fruit where God has planted them. Remember to wait upon the Lord and His promises for your future.

The Book of Revelation contains many of the precious promises of God that are yet to come:

- God promises to give you of the fountain of the water of life freely (21:6).
- God promises you a marriage supper of the Lamb (19:9).
- God promises you a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from His throne (22:1).
- God promises you a tree of life for the healing of the nations (22:2).
- God promises you that at the marriage of the Lamb, His wife will be arrayed in fine linen clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints (19:7,8).
- God promises you that face-to-face fellowship with Him will be restored and resumed with His people (21:3).
- God promises you that He will cast Satan into the bottomless pit, shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more (20:3).
- God promises you that He will cast the Devil into the same lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are and that they will be tormented day and night forever and ever (20:10).
- God promises you that he will create a new heaven and a new earth (21:1).
- God promises you that in the New Jerusalem we will have no need of the sun or of the moon to shine, for His Glory will illuminate it (21:23).
- God promises you that the dead, small and great, will stand before Him, and the Book of Life will be opened (20:12).
- God promises you that the gates to His City shall not be shut at all by day (21:25).
- God promises you that the heavenly and holy Jerusalem will have His glory, and her light will be like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal (21:10,11).

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- God promises you that there shall by no means anything enter His City that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of life (21: 27).
- God promises you that there will be no night in heaven (22:5).
- God promises you that we shall reign forever and ever in Glory with Him (22:5).
- Seas cause separation, so God promises you that there will be no more seas (21:1).

### **So walk boldly in the Lord, waiting upon Him to provide what He has promised!**

He has promised to be with us in all circumstances, but not to obliterate them for us.

The church was stunned when, on January 8, 1956, a remote tribe of Auca Indians in Ecuador massacred five missionaries. Jim Elliot, Peter Fleming, Ed McCully, Nate Saint and Roger Youderian were on a mission called 'Operation Auca.' Their focus was on the unreached tribes of the Amazon.

Their widows remained on the mission field in faith believing. *"But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God"* (1 Peter 2:20). They believed that if they continued to, *"Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching"* (2 Timothy 4:2), that they would be victorious in bringing this clan to Christ.

Holy women are powerful weapons in the hand of God. To these faith-filled widows, it was not a matter of sentiment, but a transaction of God's will. Human reasoning was supplanted by a trust that God would complete through them the good work that their husbands began.

Through the training and use of native Christians who learned to speak the Indian's dialect, and through one small victory after another, they were finally successful in securing an invitation to visit the tribe's village. It was a time of expectation and preparation for Divine direction. As they learned to communicate, they would tell of the "Man Maker" who, *"So loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life"* (John 3:16).

It was a glorious day when the five men who had murdered the missionaries were baptized into Christ along with their wives and several other villagers. Today, a church stands in that village where once only fear and superstition resided.

Jim Elliot wrote in his Bible, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose." These missionaries rose above the fray and soared beyond the clouds. For them, waiting upon the Lord was active, not passive; and

their wives, led by the Holy Spirit, waited faithfully to finish what God had started in their husbands' hearts.

Kerry Decker has written in his book, *Healing for the Wounded Heart*:

“Sometimes it seems like God is dragging His heels. Maybe it took some time before we were ready to commit to a path of healing and growth. Then when we do, we expect results to come immediately. We think that once God goes to work everything will work out and fall easily into place. Sometimes it happens like that, but usually we must learn to wait on the Lord.”

A good example of this was Joon Gon Kim, who was taken, along with sixty others, to be executed by the communist North Koreans. He was forced to watch as his father and wife were killed and then he was beaten and left for dead. Kim survived and prayed that God would give him a love for his enemies. He eventually led 30 communists to Christ, including the leader responsible for the death of his loved ones.

Abraham and his wife Sarah were childless for a long time during their marriage. They both wanted children. Then when Abraham was seventy-five years old, God promised him that he would have a child. The Bible says that Abraham believed God. Still, nothing happened during the next five ... ten ... fifteen ... twenty years. Twenty-five years after being promised a child, Abraham's son was born. The Bible says, *‘Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him’* (Genesis 21:5). Abraham waited a long time for God to do what He had promised. But God is always true to His word.

It's not easy waiting on the Lord. We might have questions. Our faith may be tested. And we might not make the best decisions in the meantime. Even Abraham didn't do what was best while waiting on God. He tried to hasten the promise and on his own terms, and fathered Ishmael. But one thing he did do right - he never stopped believing.

Paul says of Abraham, *“Contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, ‘So shall your descendants be.’ And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform”* (Romans 4:18-21). Abraham believed God.

Answers to prayer for healing and evidence of growth do not always come all at once. It is a process. And sometimes it's an agonizingly slow process. Still, it's the only path worth traveling. God will act, not necessarily when we want and in the way we want, but He will act. He always keeps His promises. We just need to continue trusting and waiting on the Lord. *“Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the Lord!”* (Psalm 27:14).



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God wants you to wait patiently for Him so that you can become the Eagle Christian He has designed you to be. Wait, even if it seems as if every nest we feather is scattered and we are constantly being driven off the ledge of life. God wants us to be ever testing our wings against the stormy gales. Just think of the pinions we have through prayer, the ranges we can sweep for Christ, and the vision we have received from God's Holy Word. Then ask yourself, "Is it not an eternal kindness that hovers over us and provides for us a safe and secure nest where eagles soar?" You are called to wait in order to take flight and live above the fray. Live patiently and bravely through fear and you will know true freedom!

### ■ Free to Love

*"For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!"* (Galatians 5:13-15).

### ■ Free to Rest

David wrote, *"Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass."* (Psalm 37:7)

### ■ Free to Yoke Yourself with Christ

Jesus said, *"Come to Me, all you 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. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light"* (Matthew 11:28-30).

"Resting" is never a noun; it's always a verb. It requires doing. Resting in Jesus to find knowledge, truth, and wisdom; to lay down your heavy burdens; to receive relief from fatigue; to renew fellowship with Christ isn't true because it works. It works because it's true.

Such sweet rest begins with God's amazing forgiveness. It is extended to all, though all do not receive it.

Here's a tough question even for the strong of faith: Would Jesus have forgiven Adolf Hitler? Perhaps survivors of the holocaust couldn't, and we can certainly understand their difficulty in forgiving. But, if Hitler had asked Christ to change his life, Jesus certainly would have. Instead, Hitler went into eternity on his own terms, ending it all by blowing his brains out in a Berlin bunker.

Let's bring it more current. Would God be willing to forgive a repentant Jeffrey Dahmer, the mass murderer of Milwaukee? Many believe He did! After Jeffrey Dahmer was incarcerated, he enrolled in our Bible correspondence school,

the *American Bible Academy*. Later, he was baptized in a whirlpool in the prison hospital. A local minister was conducting weekly Bible studies with him just before another prisoner murdered him.

What about General Manuel Antonio Noriega, the former Panamanian drug Lord?

On October 24, 1992, in a baptistery provided by American Rehabilitation Ministries, General Noriega, “Public Enemy No. 1,” was baptized in the chambers of the Honorable William M. Hoeveler, United States District Judge, Federal Court House, Miami, Florida.

The story begins in a maximum-security cell at the federal prison in Miami, where General Noriega was awaiting trial on charges of international drug trafficking and crimes against humanity. Early in January 1990, a copy of a Spanish New Testament came into the notorious prisoner’s hands. On January 10, 1990, the editor of *The Soul Winners New Testament*, Clift Brannon, a former attorney turned preacher, received a letter from Noriega. In the letter, Noriega expressed his appreciation for the copy of the Scriptures. Brannon immediately applied for a visitation permit for the purpose of religious instruction by the rights granted Noriega under the Geneva Accords.

And Clift Brannon patiently and prayerfully waited upon the Lord.

On May 15 and 16, 1990, Brannon and a Spanish interpreter, Rudy Hernandez, were allowed to visit Noriega for a total of six hours in the Metropolitan Correctional Center of Dade County, Florida. Following their visit, Noriega wrote Brannon as follows:

*“I have meditated on the spiritual sessions that you as a messenger of the Word of God brought to my heart. From my area of confinement as a Prisoner of War of the United States, I feel the necessity of adding something more to what I was able to say to you as we parted.*

*“The evening sessions of May 15 and 16 with you and Rudy Hernandez along with the Christian explanation and guidance were for me the first day of a dream, a revelation. I can tell you with great strength and inspiration that receiving our Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, guided by you, was an emotional event.*

*The hours flew by without my being aware. I could have desired that they continue forever, but there was neither time nor space. Thank you for your time. Thank you for your human warmth, for your constant and permanent spiritual strength brought to bear on my mind and soul.*

*With great affection and appreciation,  
Manuel A. Noriega”*

And Clift Brannon patiently and prayerfully waited upon the Lord.

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Following another visit in July 1990, Noriega enrolled in a Bible correspondence program offered by American Bible Academy, an in-depth Bible correspondence school, operated by ARM Prison Outreach and specifically designed for the incarcerated. At the conclusion of his personal study, the former drug lord requested permission from the prison authorities to be baptized in accordance with what he had learned from Matthew 28:19-20. His request was denied upon the advice of his attorneys.

On September 25, 1992, Brannon wrote to the Honorable William M. Hoevler, pleading the court's permission to baptize Noriega. "Only in this way can he [Noriega] genuinely show his faith in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Romans 6:3-5)." The former attorney went on to write:

*"On October 24th, we ask your authority to have a fiberglass baptistry taken into the court room and for General Manuel A. Noriega to be baptized in accord with the Holy Scriptures and in obedience to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*Sincerely submitted for Your Honor's favorable consideration.*

*Clifton W. Brannon"*

And Clift Brannon patiently and prayerfully waited upon the Lord.

In the meantime, it was necessary to secure a portable baptistry. They turned to the same ministry that has for over 40 years dedicated itself to placing baptistries in American prisons nationwide. American Rehabilitation Ministries (ARM) not only donated a communion table baptistry, but also provided two more in-depth Spanish Bible correspondence courses for General Noriega's study.

A variety of Spanish greeting cards were also sent, compliments of DaySpring Cards, an affiliate of Hallmark, along with an assortment of gospel tracts in Spanish, and a special Spanish edition of the Bible, sponsored by American Bible Society, the world's largest and oldest Bible Society.

On October 24, 1992, United Nations Day, ARM's baptistry arrived at the back door of the Federal Courthouse in Miami. A Deputy Marshall helped Brannon and his associates take the baptistry into the courtroom and fill it with water.

Noriega's baptism almost didn't happen because of daunting logistical problems and his high security status. At last, the baptism was scheduled to take place in the courthouse, in an atrium outside the door of one of the courtrooms. "That was a first," Brannon said. "We were told this had never taken place inside a federal courthouse before."

The Deputy Marshall brought General Manuel Noriega into the courtroom. Surrounded by 12 guards, Noriega, wearing civilian clothes, took off his jacket and shoes, and got into the baptistry. Brannon preached on the meaning of baptism as Hernandez interpreted followed by prayer and Scripture reading. Brannon then

immersed Noriega.

Brannon said that when Noriega “came up out of the water” you could feel the presence of the Lord in that room. Rudy had an accordion, and they all began singing *Amazing Grace*. The sound of their voices, including Noriega’s reverberated off the walls of the marble floored, makeshift sanctuary.

“It’s one of those sacred moments,” Brannon recalled. “I could feel God saying to me that He was well pleased.” Noriega was allowed to give a brief testimony and be served the Lord’s Supper before being escorted back to his maximum-security cell.

And Clift Brannon rejoiced that through it all he had patiently and prayerfully waited upon the Lord.

Later, I was privileged to spend an entire Sunday with General Noriega, which concluded with a communion service. Here, in part, is the testimony of General Manuel Antonio Noriega, the notorious international drug lord and former dictator of Panama who today, is a brother in Christ.

*“Before, Jesus to me was only an image of a historic being who worked miracles. All was transformed when on Tuesday, January the 16th, 1990, Dr. Clift asked me in a telephone conversation, he in Texas and I in a preventive prison of the court, ‘Do you know that Jesus loves you?’ Today, this is what He means to me:*

*He is the Son of God, who died on the cross for our sins, who arose from the grave and is at the right hand of God the Father and who above all things is my Savior, and has mercy on me, a sinner.”*

General Manuel Antonio Noriega was found guilty of international drug trafficking and sentenced to 40 years in the federal penitentiary in Miami, Florida. Later he was transferred to a prison in France and eventually returned and incarcerated in Panama.

General Noriega is only one of more than one million prisoners who have obeyed their Lord in Christian baptism in ARM donated baptisteries. To visualize that incomprehensible number, remember what the “million man march” on Washington, D.C., looked like.

After the baptism of General Noriega, prison authorities across America contacted ARM headquarters to request baptisteries for their prisoners too. To this day, ARM Prison Outreach International receives requests for donations of Communion Table Baptisteries and Collapsible Portable Baptisteries on a weekly basis.

Tony Ponceti, who led the former dictator in weekly discipleship studies for more than two years, said, “Gaining permission to transport ARM’s baptistry into the courthouse was nothing short of a miracle. After Noriega rose out of the water, he had no words to express the joy he sensed.”

“I’ve seen seriousness and I’ve seen the lack of it,” said one of the guards

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who monitored the fallen leader daily. “I have never seen dedication or seriousness greater than his. I am glad I was able to witness the conversion of General Manuel Antonio Noriega, the first, and to this date the only man, ever to have been baptized in a federal courtroom of a federal courthouse.”

When General Noriega learned I was writing *Soar – The Way of the Eagles*, he sent the following letter:

*“Dear brother Joe:*

*My daughter Lorena sends her greetings. She was moved by your words, ‘The Lamb that was slain is the Lion who now reigns.’ May the Lord maintain His wisdom over all the events of your life.*

*It wasn’t by chance that Dr. Clift Brannon, Rudy Hernandez, Bill White and you, the respected president of ARM, were the first teachers in my Christian awakening. Alas, only you and Bill White were still alive at the end of my incarceration in the United States.*

*The eagle I am most familiar with is the Harpia eagle of Panama. They are the largest and most powerful birds in the world. They have as their ideal habitat the humid tropical forests of Central and South America. Depletion of the rain forests is a constant threat to them. They are the longest living bird of their species and one of the wisest. They can live to be 70 years of age.*

*Harpia eagles reproduce every three years. Their talons can be up to five inches long and their diet consists of mostly monkeys. Their wingspans are about six and a half feet. The Harpia eagle flies alone. But in its seclusion and solitude it finds the stability and strength that decides its destiny.*

*My personal experience has been that we have to segregate ourselves from time to time in order to continue our flight in life. It is here that we get rid of the old customs, memories and traditions that have caused us defeat and pain. Only when we are free from the past will we be able to take advantage of the present and the future and soar ... like the Harpia eagle.*

*– General Manuel Antonio Noriega”*





## Chapter 11

# RISKING MORE, FLYING HIGHER

### THE BRAVE EAGLET

*“The eaglet has taken to the air and sucks in the heady pleasure of flight like a child with his first piece of birthday cake! He’s all over the place, dipping, regaining altitude, falling behind, and scurrying to catch up. And all the while, Mom is constant ... and he knows she is. Why else would he be so brave?”*

**-ANONYMOUS**

*The young bird can no longer be called eaglet. For today, he faces a challenge alone. A thunderstorm approaches and doubt begins to swell within him like the mounting clouds on the horizon. With his mother absent, it is only he and his creator who’ll mount the drafts and brave the storm. It’s time for him to fully realize these are the unpredictable and often volatile wilderness moments for which he was designed.*

*He sees an opening in the clouds, and like his father before him, rockets through to the winds that are waiting. At last, he’s found his destiny.*

By now, you’ve come to appreciate, as have I, the diligence eagles use in training their young to fly. We’ve studied together the impressive and intentional way that they teach by example. And in this process, my prayer is that you have clearly seen the parallel between God’s regal, winged tutor and our majestic and loving Lord. God desires for us to learn from Him.

This is one of the main reasons He sent Christ into the world. Not just to die for us, but also to teach us how to live; to be an example and mentor for us. There is only one way you and I can follow Him and hear His counsel, and that is by imitating Him.

Paul used this method of mentoring when in 1 Corinthians 11:1 he wrote,

*“Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.”* His every ambition was blotted out, save one – to teach others how to become Eagle Christians. They were to scrutinize and emulate him just as eaglets observe and mimic their parents. To imitate means to walk and speak the acts, nature and words of another. If we mirror our Savior, we will become like Christ and our world will then be able to see a true demonstration of the power of God.

Just as the mother eagle feeds her baby, so the same Spirit of God who *“hovered over the face of the waters”* (Genesis 1: 2), who *“descended”* upon Christ at His baptism (Matthew 3:16), who *“gives life”* (II Corinthians 3:6), will also inspire our mind and spirit. And, when we have spiritually outgrown our nest, the Lord is still there to take us to the next level (Matthew 28:20).

God loves you and wants to guide you so that you can demonstrate Christ-like qualities, develop your full potential, and have a courageous and strong heart. He longs to see us with a deep faith and watch us soar to heights we never dreamed, and swoop in to help a struggling brother or sister, just to take them back to the heights with us. This is His heart.

*“The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment”* (2 Peter 2:9). *“‘For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,’ says the Lord. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts’”* (Isaiah 55:8, 9).

But the scriptures also state, *“Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy”* (1 Peter 4:12-13).

Whether you are waiting on direction, deliverance or the opportunities to do what Christ has already asked you to do, first pray. Then, follow the Lord’s leading.

Sometimes we’ll have mountain top experiences in our lives and at other times we’ll find ourselves walking through the valley of the shadow of spiritual death and doubt. Regardless of the highs and lows, God’s wing is always there, and God is ever waiting to bear us up once again. Think back to when you first became a Christian. Think about the confession you made before all those present: *“Yes, I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.”* What a mountain top experience that was in your life! Now, think of times when you encountered the valleys and felt yourself drifting farther and farther from God. This happens in everyone’s life, not just yours. Those times are just as important in shaping you into the image of Christ. At both ends of the spectrum and in every moment, you are designed to glorify God in it.

As a result of His unending love, God always provides the means to choose victorious flight. He may inject an updraft of renewal and revival to spiritually ener-



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gize us when doubt, fear and sin try to hinder our forward and upward progress. The lift might come through a neighbor who doesn't even realize that the Lord is using him or her. It might come from a sermon, a prayer, or a song in church. But God always provides a ray of light to lead us out of the dark storm and back to Him.

Paul assures us, *“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose”* (Romans 8:28). *“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”* (Romans 8:38-39).

When it seems impossible, it isn't. The Lord said, *“I will never leave you nor forsake you”* (Hebrews 13:5).

The storms rage in many ways. Perhaps yours includes hailstones hammering at your heart from the break-up of a marriage. You're wondering if you have the courage to try and repair it, wondering if you have the heart to forgive. You may feel flooded with worry; in over your head from financial ruin or a lost job you're battling. Dark clouds assume many shapes: the loss of a child, sickness or depression. Whatever storm you are being pummeled by right now, God is in the midst. He wants you to look for that shard of light through the overwhelming clouds above you and rocket through it toward Him.

Often the storms brew from within rather than overhead. Maybe you think you have really “messed things up” and are tired of hurting those you love. Maybe you're tempted, “for their sake,” to walk away and never look back. Look up! He is there.

If you are dealing with anything that sounds like these blustery winds and you haven't yet met the One who can carry you through them and lift you above them, trust Jesus with your marriage, finances and loved ones. Take a chance on Him!

To those who have seen the Light, felt His flapping wings and known God's watchful presence, don't make the mistake of thinking this doesn't apply to you. You may have dived off the ledge long ago and weathered many storms, but sometimes it's those of us who have been at this the longest who forget that God can still surprise us. When we're willing to put our anger, doubt, fear, and prejudice aside, we truly begin to look like Christ.

While touring the Alaska Prison System, I conducted a “See Through the Scriptures” seminar at the Women's Prison in Eagle River, the only prison exclusively for women in the entire state. I was scheduled for three hours each night for four nights, and the chapel was almost full for the opening session. Some prisoners come to chapel pretty uptight. They have committed sins worthy of a prison sentence; they are in trouble with family and society, and many realize they are in trouble with God. One good thing about ministering to prisoners is that you never have to waste

your time trying to convince your audience that they are “sinners in the hands of an angry God.” They know why they are incarcerated, but they aren’t exactly sure why I am there. So they are both uptight and curious. This tense combination demands a sense of humor. And it just so happens I’ve been blessed with one! By blending a little humor into the teaching, these anxious, suspicious, enemies of the state begin loosening up. And when they start laughing, they start learning. Along with humor, I also use the interrogation method of teaching. I ask a lot of questions in an effort to keep the prisoners alert, participating and thinking.

Prisons are like churches in that each congregation is basically alike – yet different. Each prison audience is alike in the qualities described above, yet still unique. Every individual comes with different walls, different baggage and their own brand of brokenness. Every convict enters with opportunities and possibilities. During the course of the teaching, I begin to see glimpses of whether I’m hitting barriers or breaking them down with the gospel message. As Jesus said in the parable of the sower, sometimes you compete with the “birds” (false doctrine, unbelief) coming and devouring the gospel seed, while at other times you struggle in “stony places” (hard hearts). Quite often you are teaching those who have no “roots” in Christianity and you always contend with the “thorns” of sin springing up and choking out the Word of God. But then there is that good ground that yields a harvest, “*Some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty*” (Matthew 13:3-9).

On the first night of our seminar at Eagle River, we were only a few minutes into the program when the chapel door opened and in walked a young lady who introduced herself as “Sonya Satan.” I have no clue how she earned that name, but how far from the love of God would you have to be to claim it?

Prisoners know who Satan is. He has tempted and tortured them a thousand times in a thousand ways. He gnaws at their conscience with guilt and haunting dreams of heinous crimes they’ve committed. He whispers hateful hopelessness into those facing long and lonely jail sentences. He keeps them fearful and angry with constant threats and potential attacks from the pecking order within the prison community. And he makes them wary of trusting anyone on the outside who could offer possible peace.

Sonya had come to the seminar for only one reason – to totally disrupt everything I was hoping to accomplish in the name of the Lord Jesus. She was a natural bully. She had honed her bullying techniques over many decades and was prepared to use them on me and the ladies present.

She sat down on the middle chair in the front row and it didn’t take long for her to start heckling and taunting me. Any time I would say something the slightest bit humorous, she would mock me by responding with a loud offensive hackle as if to say, “That wasn’t funny at all.” This continued until at last she successfully shut down my ability to use humor.

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Sonya was smart in an evil sort of way. Next, she began chipping away at my strategic queries. When I would ask a question pertaining to the topic of discussion, Sonya would always answer first, with some irreverent “off the wall” retort that had nothing at all to do with the subject matter. By the end of that first night, she had completely eliminated my desire to use humor *or* ask questions.

When I got back to my motel that night, I was depressed and discouraged. I had come so far ... for this? There were women in that chapel who really wanted to learn. But Sonya had so intimidated me that I had no joy in my teaching. Consequently, the seminar had turned into a dry three hours with nine more to go. I prayed to God, “For the sake of the program and the other women, it’s better that she leaves. Please take her out.”

God did not answer my prayer. For the next three nights, I had to endure nine more hours of Sonya Satan. I was despondent and exhausted when the unappealing twelfth hour finally arrived. There were only about 30 minutes left when I absolutely could not take it any longer. I could not stand one more minute of her. I thought to myself, “*I have to end on a positive note. I am going to call security and have her escorted out.*”

Suddenly, the blessed Holy Spirit spoke to my heart and said, “The only one she is bothering is you. Look at the other women. They are intent on hearing the Word of the Lord. If they can live with her on a daily basis, surely you can tolerate her 30 more minutes.”

It was true. She had successfully done what she came to do. I could not let her seal the victory by having her physically removed from the chapel. From that moment on, I entirely ignored her and pretended she was not there.

We concluded by forming a prayer circle. After going through the plan of salvation, I extended the gospel invitation for “whosoever will.” I said, “If there is anyone here who desires to step” ... and those were the last words out of my mouth. With a blood-curdling scream, Sonya cried out, “I’m stepping ... I’m stepping.”

I looked over at her in disbelief. Tears were streaming from her eyes. She grabbed the lady next to her and shouted, “I’m sorry. I’m sorry for the way I’ve acted. I want to become a Christian too.”

Our prayer circle broke up as the ladies rushed over to congratulate and rejoice with her. When calm was eventually restored, I received her good confession of faith and led the group in prayer and praise to God for His great and glorious grace. I had to leave the next day but the chaplain assured me that she would follow up on Sonya and baptize her into Christ.

I learned a big lesson the night that Sonya turned her back on Satan and bent her knee in worship to Christ. I am overjoyed that God did not answer my prayer to “take her out”, and that I heeded His voice when the Holy Spirit spoke to me. I now know the true meaning of Zechariah 4:6, “*Not by might nor by power, but by My*

*Spirit, Says the Lord of hosts.”*

I will meet more Sonya-Satan’s along the way. When I do, I will strive to remember my experience at Eagle River. “God can forgive the worst sinner on earth.” How many times have you heard a preacher say something like that? Or, “God loves everyone. He doesn’t want anyone to perish. There is no sinner too sinful for God to forgive, if that person will repent and come to Christ in faith.” But do we believe it? What if the sin is REALLY big?

I have been to India seven times, but seldom have I left without the Indian Christians telling me about their great Christian evangelist, Sadhu Sundar Singh. The word Sadhu means “holy man” and Sundar Singh was unlike any other.

He was born into the Sikh caste and often read the Hindu scriptures until midnight. But the doctrine of reincarnation did not satisfy his spiritual hunger or answer his supernal questions. When his mother and older brother died within a few months of each other, he was cast into depression and despair. How could he ever know for certain what life forms they would take when they were reborn into this world? And what would he become in the next life? Would he ever see them again? If he did, would he be able to recognize them?

The law of Karma, which is the law of works and retribution, was all he knew. He was so prejudiced against Christianity that he once tore up a Bible and burned it. His Hindu friends told him he had done a good deed, but that experience haunted him. Finally, when he could bear it no longer, Sundar presented himself before the Lord in prayer like a poor, dumb, paralytic beggar at a rich man’s gate. He pleaded with God to end the unrest that was in his soul. He concluded his prayer by saying that if he did not soon receive an answer, he would go to the railway station and place his head on the rail before an oncoming train.

He expected an appearance from Buddha or Krishna, but they did not appear.

Unbelievers can explain away every miracle in the Bible ... except answered prayer. And this was one of those prayers that resulted in a miracle. When the false gods failed, God spoke to Sundar’s heart, not in a great and strong wind or in an earthquake or fire, but in a still, small voice recognizable only to Sundar.

Sundar later wrote, “For all eternity, I will never forget the message he burned in my heart. I was filled with inexpressible joy and peace. My whole life was entirely changed. I was to serve the living Christ. Without Christ, I had been full of fear and without hope. He turned my fear into love and my hopelessness into faith. As soon as possible, I was baptized and began going about preaching the gospel.”

Throughout his ministry, Sadhu Sundar Singh was a “free spirit.” He would show up unannounced in one of the many parks in Bombay, Calcutta or Madras and begin preaching. Soon crowds would gather, sometimes in the hundreds – sometimes in the thousands, and Christians would rent sound equipment for him. Then one night, with thousands in attendance, the Sadhu would not be there. He would

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instead be out in some remote community teaching a small group of villagers.

He always refused money. He would accept a bus or train ticket as long as it was second class. He made a vow to never own more than he could carry in his shoulder pouch.

Books have been written about Sadhu Sundar Singh telling of his unique and unparalleled missionary journeys. But the account I love most is when he journeyed high into the Himalayan Mountains of Tibet in response to a cave dweller's request.

The hermit met him at the opening of the cave. For several hours they sat at the mouth of the cavern as the man asked many questions about God, Christ and the church. At last, the recluse invited the Sadhu to come with him inside the cave.

The Sadhu said that as they proceeded deep inside the cavern, his eyes slowly began to adjust to the darkness. On the floor lay several human skeletons. At the same time he recognized them as such, the hermit grasped his arm and with tears streaming down his cheeks, exclaimed, "Sadhu, Sadhu, I have killed these people and I have eaten their meat. Can your Jesus forgive me of these sins?" The Sadhu replied without hesitation, "All the caves on the face of this earth cannot contain the sins that Christ can forgive."

Grace like this is hard to accept, but it is a free gift from God. God asks us to begin the process by reaching out in faith and receiving it. Pride can keep us from this grace as well.

The story of Naaman in 2 Kings 5 tells the story of the commander of the army of the king of Syria. Let me say that again, in case you are unaware of the import of who this man was. Syria was a mighty and terror-inducing nation in its day and this man commanded the king's army! Scripture puts it this way in verse 1b, "*He was a great and honorable man in the sight of his master, because by him, the Lord had given victory to Syria. He was also a mighty man of valor, but a leper.*"

Wow! You didn't see that one coming, did you? After all the build-up, "leper" is not the recommendation one expects. In current times, leprosy is completely treatable, but in ancient times, it was a death sentence as well as a social death sentence. The king needed Naaman and valued him as well.

The Syrians had gone out on raids and brought back as a captive from Israel a young girl who served Naaman's wife. Many times, when we read the story of Naaman, we focus on Naaman, his affliction and the act of obedience. These are worthy lessons and we'll look at them, but I want mainly to focus on the young captive girl. She was away from home and family, in a foreign country with foreign customs, foreign gods and she was a slave. Yet, she did not forget her roots or her God. She found the courage to speak to her mistress on her master's behalf.

Put yourself in her sandals. She could have let him silently suffer, lose his position and eventually die or, at the very least, be exiled. She might even have felt it was what he deserved for tearing her away from her home, but she chose something

different. She spoke up when it was less than wise to do so. Worst case scenario, her master and mistress might have found her advice insulting; might have felt she should not even have pointed out the master's weakness. Best case scenario, they listened to her, but what then? What if God chose not to heal this man? What if the prophet refused his request? All the master's anger and disappointment would likely return to roost on her young shoulders. And with no one in this new land to fall back on in a time of need, she could find herself destitute and homeless.

Yet, in verse 3, she finds the courage to speak up, *"Then she said to her mistress, 'If only the master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! For he would heal him of his leprosy.'"*

Naaman immediately told his king who wrote a letter to the king of Israel which said, *"Now be advised when this letter comes to you, that I have sent Naaman, my servant, to you, that you may heal him of his leprosy"* (v. 6b).

I love verses seven and eight. *"And it happened, when the king of Israel read the letter, that he tore his clothes and said, 'Am I God, to kill and make alive, that this man sends a man to me to heal him of his leprosy? Therefore please consider, and see how he seeks a quarrel with me.'"*

*So it was, when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, 'Why have you torn your clothes? Please let him come to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel.'"*

The king of Israel is like the barnyard chickens, scratching and pecking and looking in terror at the clouds rolling in, scrambling for a way out of the storm that he knows is about to be unleashed. Elisha is like the eagle, soaring casually on the current of God's power and mercy, saying, "Not a problem. God's got this." I love the line, *"why have you torn your clothes?"* as if Elisha is saying, "get a hold of yourself man. Put yourself back together and send him to me."

And consider again our young captive girl. By choosing to open her mouth, she has not only involved her mistress and master, but the king of Syria AND the king of Israel. But her faith was strong enough to chance the wrath of both of them for she knew her God was bigger.

So Naaman sets out to see Elisha, taking an entourage with him. He shows up at Elisha's door, only to find that Elisha apparently cannot be bothered to come out and see him. Verse 10, *"And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, 'Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean.' But Naaman became furious, and went away and said, 'Indeed, I said to myself, 'He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leprosy.' Are not the Abanah and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?'" So he turned and went away in a rage."*

Take yourself out of "bible-reading" mode and see this passage for what it is.

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Naaman was a big deal, but he was probably dealing with some major insecurities because of the leprosy. He shows up with an entourage, likely in part, to show his station and power and Elisha won't even come to the door. He was embarrassed in front of his underlings and frustrated that Elisha didn't respect his station more. You can also gather, from reading this passage, that he felt Syria was far superior to Israel and even voiced the opinion that the rivers there would have been cleaner to wash in. He is royally ticked off!

Again, it is a servant who saves the day. *“And his servants came near and spoke to him, and said, ‘My father, if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, ‘Wash, and be clean’?’ So he went down and dipped seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.*

*And he returned to the man of God, he and all his aides, and came and stood before him; and he said, “Indeed, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel.”*

As Eagle Christians, we are called to be bold servants as well, risking more to fly higher, just as these servants did. As an eagle overcomes the law of gravity by stretching its wings and catching the currents of the wind, so you can rise above the clouds of this world by mounting up with wings of faith, even when doing so is a scary prospect. As an eagle spreads its wings over its young during a rainstorm, so God will shelter you beneath the shadow of His wings during the storms of life. As an eagle can see great distances, so God will give you the ability to use your eagle eyes to see spiritual truths that most in this world will never envision.

It is by grace that we have been saved through faith (Ephesians 2:8). The writer of Hebrews exhorts us to *“imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises”* (Hebrews 6:12). Then he lists notable examples by taking us on a tour of God's “Hall of Fame” in chapter eleven:

*“By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain ... and through it he being dead still speaks”* (11:4). Abel gave his best, first.

*By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death ... for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God”* (11:5). It was not by works but through intimacy that he found favor with God. Enoch's walk with God was unlike any earthly fellowship; the more time he spent with the Lord, the more he acquired of God. The farther he walked, the stronger he became. Hills and valleys only tempered his faithfulness. His was a faith that filled his life with fragrance and brought a smile to the face of God. And one day he soared like an eagle into the presence of God.

*“By faith Noah ... prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according*

to faith” (11:7). Noah means “comforter”, and he moved with godly fear in his role to bring about the *destruction* of sin, whereas God sent the second comforter, Jesus Christ, for *salvation* from sin. Water was God’s means of purifying the earth in Noah’s day and would later serve as a purification for Christian baptism, “... which now saves us...” (1 Peter 3:21).

“By faith Abraham ... waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (11:10). The Lord said that Abraham would be, “a father of many nations” (Genesis 17:4). His name appears almost 300 times in 20 different books of the Bible. He is called “the father of the faithful” and three times “the friend of God.” When every nation on earth had chosen a god for itself, the God of Heaven chose for Himself a nation on earth ... the divinely appointed line of Abraham (Genesis 12:2).

“By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed ... because she judged Him faithful who had promised” (11:11). Sarah laughed when she first learned that she would bear a son in her old age. Though she grew impatient, God kept His word and Sarah remembered His divine message. Regarding this promise the angel of the Lord asked in Genesis 18:14, “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” The entire remainder of the Bible is an answer to this question.

“By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come” (11:20). All that is said in scripture about Isaac’s birth ranks second only to that of Christ’s miraculous arrival on earth. Isaac was one of four miracle babies in the Bible; the other three being Samson, John the Baptist and Jesus. He and his wife Rebekah birthed the Bible’s first recorded set of twins. Isaac was a type of Christ in that he was born in the fullness of time, had a miracle birth, was predestined, pre-named, and was the delight of his father. He longed to impart the blessings of God to the next generation.

“By faith Jacob...blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff” (11:21). After wrestling with an angel of God until daybreak (Genesis 32: 24), Jacob received a new name: *Israel*, which means “Prince of God.” His name was changed to indicate that he would then walk differently, both physically and spiritually. The angel touched the socket of Jacob’s hip so that he would forever be crippled among men, but blessed by God.

“By faith Joseph...made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones” (11:22). After David and Jesus, the greatest number of life details recorded regarding any other person in the scriptures are shared about Joseph. Although Joseph suffered opposition and persecution, his life is an example of how God can turn bleak pictures into bright tomorrows. Nowhere is ill spoken of Joseph.

“By faith Moses...chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin” (11:25). Moses “was learned in all the wis-



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*dom of the Egyptians*” (Acts 7:22), but after spending 40 years in the wilderness for murder, he was described as “*very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth*” (Numbers 12:3). When he removed his sandals while standing on holy ground, God then shod Moses’ feet for unholy ground; and the rest is history.

“*By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe*” (11:31). Rahab made a decision - then that decision turned around and made her. She would later marry Salmon and give birth to Boaz, the husband of Ruth, placing her in the ancestral line of Christ (Matthew 1:5). The scarlet cord Rahab tied in the window foreshadowed the bloodline of Jesus.

Elsewhere in the Bible, we see more examples of the mighty hand of God upon even those who faltered in their own faith. Gideon’s fear did not stop him from doing the will of God because “*the Lord was with him*” (Judges 6:12). Barak’s calling testifies that what God does not rule, He will overrule (Judges 4:6, 7). Samson’s choice of a mate from among the enemies of God led him far from home, resulting in both physical and spiritual blindness, but the Lord “*remembered him*” and “*strengthened him*” (Judges 16:28). Although Jephthah ran with “*worthless men,*” God showed that He could still use him and work through him (Judges 11:3).

And what shall we say of David? David (the young shepherd) and Christ (the Good Shepherd) were both born in Bethlehem, which, remember, in Hebrew means “house of bread.” David left a pasture to enter the palace. He went from being a lowly shepherd to becoming the King of Israel. His life went full circle from being a man after God’s own heart, to becoming an adulterer and murderer, to returning to “*The God of his salvation.*”

As for Samuel and the prophets – “*They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented – of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth*” (Hebrews 11:37, 38).

These are our mentors . . . men and women who soared as eagles for God! They risked it all and they flew right into the arms of Jesus at their journey’s end.

Though I tried mightily to deny God’s plan for how I would soar in him, He won out and I have never been sorry. With such powerful evidence of changed lives, it’s not difficult for me to be in love with this fruitful and vast mission field called Prison Evangelism. When I founded ARM Prison Outreach in 1973, America’s prison population was only about 234,000. Today, ARM’s target audience is more than 2.2 million people who are incarcerated in America’s 1,600 state and federal prisons and 3,100 county and city jails. They are men, women, boys and girls. The majority of them are sitting in isolated cells without God, without Christ and without a hope in this world. And long before any chaplain or I have entered that dank, smelly jail, prison or reformatory cell, the Holy Spirit has preceded us,

preparing hearts for the message of Christ.

The United States government recognizes 196 nations around the world. Of these, 51 have a population of less than 2,000,000 people. The U.S. prison system has a population of 2,200,000 inmates, rendering the U.S. prison system larger than one fourth of the nations in the world! It is actually a nation within our nation, with its own judicial, political and social structure. It is a third world country in every respect with a culture all its own. Concrete walls, gun towers, and rows upon rows of razor wire surround it. Nobody wants to be there – not even the guards. Its citizens have a welfare mentality. A fight can break out over a bag of potato chips; a person can die for an unpaid debt. Billions of dollars flow into it annually, yet little comes out.

Its citizens have all come to this nation shackled in leg irons, handcuffs and waist chains. Once inside, they dress alike and eat the same food. The days are long and the nights are longer. News consists of rumors of murders, riots and suicides. Lack of money and power leads to fear, which begets loneliness, then gives way to bitterness. All three are targets for jailhouse predators.

In this foreign country called the U.S. prison system, ground is taken slowly from the enemy. Its residents have spent years defending their behavior, justifying their actions and refusing to see themselves for what they are. Yet Jesus said in Matthew 25, *“I was in prison, and you came to Me ... inasmuch as you did it to one of these My brethren, you did it to Me.”*

For many of these souls, prison is the very place they learn to fly!

1. How about you? Are you willing to risk more in order to fly higher? God’s “fluttering over us” can serve as our greatest motivation for spiritual growth. We can also perceive all that He allows into our lives affliction, anguish, chastening, discouragement, opposition, pressure and trouble. Trials like these can become destructive to our faith if we fail to see the hand of God behind it and the feet of God walking us through it: “For the people do not turn to Him who strikes them, Nor do they seek the Lord of hosts” (Isaiah 9:13).

You can be absolutely certain that God knows you by name. He numbers the hairs of your head, and understands your problems. At this very moment, He is hovering over you to guide you from the cross to the crown, from humiliation to glory, from time to eternity.

God’s desire for you is that you leave your nest, your comfort zone, and learn to soar into and above the storms of life with Him. Soaring doesn’t mean you are unaware of the storm, only that you are confident in the midst of it. When you step out in faith, trusting only in Him, He *will* carry, sustain and raise you up to spiritual heights and understanding beyond your wildest imagination.

There are not many that dare to make their nests where eagles soar. It is a matter of choice, a matter of the heart, and a surrender of the will. It’s a choice to let go and

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allow God to lift us to new spiritual heights so we can become Eagle Christians.

Neither the nest nor the ledges are meant for lingering. Eagle Christian, God is calling you. He is waiting to sound a trumpet of victory over you. Take to the sky. Go fly with the eagles!



# ADDENDUM I

## SCRIPTURES DEPICTING THE CHARACTERISTICS OF EAGLES

*A multitude of concepts is used to describe the attributes of God such as: August, Confident, Dignified, Elevated, Exalted and Imposing. Now hear what the Word of God has to say about the nature of eagles, which are designed by this same Magnificent, Holy Creator.*

**BEAUTIFUL** - The eagle was one of those feathered beauties that God saw as good when He said, *“and let birds fly above the earth across the face of the firmament of the heavens”* (Genesis 1:20).

**BOLD** – *“Though you make your nest as high as the eagle, I will bring you down from there, says the Lord”* (Jeremiah 49:16).

**BRAVE** – *“A great eagle with large wings and long pinions, Full of feathers of various colors, Came to Lebanon And took from the cedar the highest branch”* (Ezekiel 17:3).

**CONFIDENT** – *“You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself”* (Exodus 19:4).

**CONSUMING** – *“His horses are swifter than eagles. Woe to us, for we are plundered!”* (Jeremiah 4:13).

**FAST** – *“For riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away like an eagle toward heaven”* (Proverbs 23:5).

**FEARLESS** – *“Behold, He shall come up and fly like the eagle, and spread His wings over Bozrah; The heart of the mighty men of Edom in that day shall be Like the heart of a woman in birth pangs”* (Jeremiah 49:22).

**FRESH** – *“Who satisfies your mouth with good things, So that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s”* (Psalm 103:5).

**INTELLIGENT** – *“Does the eagle mount up at your command, And make its nest on high? On the rock it dwells and resides, On the crag of the rock and the stronghold. From there it spies out the prey; Its eyes observe from afar”* (Job 39:27-29).

**POWERFUL** – *“They pass by like swift ships, Like an eagle swooping on its prey”* (Job 9:26).

**PROUD** – *“Though you ascend as high as the eagle, And though you set your nest among the stars, From there I will bring you down, ’ says the Lord”* (Obadiah 4).

**QUICK** – *“Our pursuers were swifter than the eagles of the heavens. They pursued us on the mountains And lay in wait for us in the wilderness”* (Lamentations 4:19).

**GRAND** – *“For thus says the Lord: ‘Behold, one shall fly like an eagle, and spread his wings over Moab’”* (Jeremiah 48:40).

**SPIRITED** – *“Saul and Jonathan were beloved and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided; they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions”* (2 Samuel 1:23).

**STRONG** – *“There are three things which are too wonderful for me, yes, four which I do not understand: the way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent on a rock, the way of a ship in the midst of the sea, and the way of a man with a virgin”* (Proverbs 30: 18, 19).

**SWIFT** – *“The Lord will bring a nation against you from afar; from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flies, a nation whose language you will not understand”* (Deuteronomy 28:49).

**UNDAUNTED** – *“Their chargers charge ahead; their cavalry comes from afar; they fly as the eagle that hastens to eat”* (Habakkuk 1:8).

## **ADDENDUM II**

### **SPIRITUAL LESSONS LEARNED FROM EAGLES**

*“Apply your heart to instruction,  
And your ears to words of knowledge.”*

**-PROVERBS 23:12**

- A serpent cannot harm the eaglets or eggs while the parents are present. In the same way, Satan knows that a Christian is easier tampered with when he is separated from the Father. God’s care over His people is likened to the awesome skills and majestic appearance of the eagle in Exodus 19:4.
- Although an eagle is able to see a storm approaching from a great distance he does not have the ability to stop it, only to rise above it. He cannot defeat the storm, but he can put it beneath his feet (Hebrews 2:8). As an eagle soars effortlessly into the storms, so the Christian soars beyond the storms of life, and rises on wings of faith in God. In Isaiah 40:31 God compares the believers’ ability to rise above the cares of this world to the eagle’s ability to soar.
- An eagle can navigate his way nest-ward from hundreds of miles away because God has equipped him with an infallible sense of direction. Likewise, any man or woman can find their way to God from anywhere in the universe (Luke 11:9).
- An eagle will spread its wings over its young to shade them from the intense heat of the sun, shield them from danger, and serve as an umbrella during a driving rainstorm, just as God will hide and comfort you under the shadow of His wings (Psalm 17:8).
- As an eagle’s nest becomes a hiding place where he can find rest and renewal, so the Christian experiences great peace and strength when, at the end of life’s day, he returns to that secret place where he can enjoy sweet communion with God.
- As an eaglet matures he resembles his parents more and more, just as *“We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord”* (2 Corinthians 3:18).
- As the caterpillar changes into a butterfly and the down of the eaglet into feathers, so too can the sinner become a saint (2 Corinthians 5:17).
- As the eagle has the ability to see detail at an extraordinary distance, so the Chris-

tian's joy comes from seeing, through the Word and the Holy Spirit, the depths of God's endless love and mercy.

- As the eagle searches carefully for the cleft of the rock where he can live and raise a family, so we Christians must build our lives upon that Rock that is Christ (1 Corinthians 10:4).
- As the eagle was created with eyes that can look directly into the sun and not be blinded, so the Christian has been given spiritual eyes that can see beyond the physical boundaries of this world.
- Each of us must ask ourselves, "Do I want to be an Eagle Christian and soar to great and majestic heights, or do I want to live as a barnyard chicken, dependent upon the 'chicken coop' for protection?"
- In Deuteronomy 28:49 God warned His people that if they persisted in evil, He would send a nation against them that would be as swift as the eagle. Several times God uses the eagle as a symbol for those nations He will employ and send forth to perform a work of destruction (Jeremiah 4:13; 48:40).
- In Proverbs 23:5 God explains that the rich man's wealth can be dissipated just as quickly as an eagle can disappear from sight.
- Lying comfortably on downy padding does not attain eagle-hood, and neither is true Christianity realized by sitting on a soft church pew or trying to soar while resting on the back of the preacher or upon one's own past achievements.
- The eagle is part of God's handiwork so we must share this planet together. We both have been placed here for a reason – to reveal His invisible attributes. (Romans 1:20).
- The eagle's source of strength is his diet, just as the Christian's source of strength is his spiritual diet (John 6:57).
- When banders (those who track eagles for scientific research and preservation) climb to an eagle's nest, both adults will usually abandon it. This leads credence to Genesis 9:2 that states: "*And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move on the earth, and on all the fish of the sea. They are given into your hand.*"
- While the eaglet is learning to fly he is unaware of the value of his education until class is over, just as we sometimes feel that the lessons God is teaching us are too inconvenient or painful. But in the end, they lead to higher plains.



# ADDENDUM III

## INTRIGUING FACTS ABOUT EAGLES

*“All things were made through Him,  
and without Him nothing was made that was made.”*

–JOHN 1:3

### THE EAGLE’S DESIGN

- There are some 60 different species of eagles in the world. Bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus* – “white headed sea eagle”) are members of the Accipitridae family of birds, which includes all eagles, harriers, hawks, kites and Old World vultures, and historically range from Alaska and Canada to northern Mexico.
- Bald eagles are not to be confused with Golden eagles (the only other kind of eagle found in North America), as they are a different variety. The largest population of bald eagles is in Alaska, Canada, and the Pacific Northwest.
- The adult bald eagle is the only bird that is black in the middle and white on both ends. Bald eagles were originally called American eagles and are the only variety of eagles unique to North America. Male and female eagles are identical in color. The “northern” bald eagles (those native to 40 degrees north latitude) are usually slightly larger than the “southern” bald eagles (those native to south of 40 degrees north latitude).
- The American eagle received its name “bald” from the Greek word *Phalios* that means, “having a white spot.” Bald Eagles are not actually bald; rather the tops of their heads are covered with small white feathers.
- Bald eagles may live as long as 30 years in the wild (50 years in captivity), but the average life span is between 15 to 20 years. Today, there are an estimated total of over 20,000 bald eagles in the “lower 48” with more than 35,000 in Alaska.
- A mature eagle can dive at 100 miles per hour and can spread his wings and position his tail with such stunning skill that he can come to a dead stop in mid-air in the space of 20 feet. His waterproof tail feathers serve as a rudder to help slow or stabilize his flight.
- An eagle can ruffle both his large outer feathers and his small inner feathers for cleaning and grooming. Eagles’ feathers consist of interlocking microscopic

structures that are light, but very strong. Layers of feathers trap air to insulate eagles against cold and rain.

- An eagle's body frame is constructed of hollow, air-filled bones and covered with over 7,000 feathers. His feathers weigh twice as much as his bones. Only the tops of his legs are covered with "leg feathers."
- An eagle's eyes are yellow with deep "dark as midnight" pupils that are both haunting and penetrating. An eagle has eyesight that is five to six times sharper than a human, and he sees in color. He can see an animal over one mile away.
- An eagle's front talons hold the prey while the back talon performs the kill – almost always at first strike. Bald eagles have sharp, pointed scales with spiny projections called spicules, which cover the soles of their talons and help grip slippery fish and snakes.
- An eagle's wing consists of an elbow, a wrist, and up to 20' long primary finger feathers. The eagle's main feathers, called primaries, are tapered at the ends, forming slots that serve as shock absorbers. This makes his bulky body appear to be sleeker than it is.
- An eagle's wings are stretched to their fullest while soaring, but when gliding the wings are pulled inward and the tips are pointed backward. Because of their wingspan, many are electrocuted each year while attempting to land on or preparing to leave power-line poles.
- Eagle's "wrists" located between their body and primary wing tips, enable them to stretch their wings like full sails in a steady wind or tuck in their wings for banking, diving or moving sideways in the air.
- An eagle's wingspan (six to seven feet from tip to tip fully stretched) is relative to his weight, allowing an eagle to glide forward losing very little altitude. An average adult bald eagle weighs approximately nine pounds and is about three feet in height.
- An eagle's wingtips are tapered so that when the eagle fully extends his long broad wings while soaring, the feathered wingtips become widely separated, resulting in a reduction of turbulence as air passes over and under the end of the wings.
- When an eagle soars, his finger-tips (primary wings) constantly feel and touch the wind, making small adjustments as they spread out and close in, and his tail is always angling one way, then another, in small fluid movements enabling him to drift comfortably.
- Experimental aircraft designers have unsuccessfully attempted to duplicate the

eagle's slotted wing design. Widely curved and separated primary (wingtip) feathers are the eagle's main flight controls regulating lift and direction of movement.

- Hackles are long feathers on the neck and lower back, which are raised when the eagle is excited, much like the hair on a cat's back. Eagles are natural fighters and will vie with other eagles and often with four-legged competitors over food.
- As bald eagles age, their eyes and beaks gradually turn yellow. Sometime during their fourth year the white hood and white tail feathers complete their growth, and at around five years of age eagles acquire their full coloring and reach sexual maturity.
- Bald eagles breathe with their lungs and air sac system. They breathe through the openings on the side of their beaks called "nares." The eagle's beak is so strong it can crack open the skull of a coyote with one tap.
- Bald eagles can fly to an altitude of 10,000 feet. During level flight, they can achieve speeds of about 30 to 35 mph. They prefer older, tall trees or cliffs (primarily along rivers) as "rest stops."
- An eagle is tolerant to cold weather because his beak requires little blood supply, his strong legs and powerful talons are mostly tendon and therefore cold resistant, and his skin is protected by feathers lined with down.
- An eagle's beak and talons are made of keratin, the same substance as our fingernails and hair, so they grow continuously and must occasionally be trimmed on ledges or rocks. The talons on a full-grown eagle are larger than the canine teeth of a lion.
- The eagles' first weapons of choice are their talons. When diving, the eagle will wait until the last few seconds to open his three front talons and point his back talon forward. The gripping power of the eagle is ten times that of a human.
- Bald eagles have four talons on each foot, three in the front and one in the back. Each is tremendously strong and crushing. Eagle talons are razor sharp, measure approximately three inches, and are used to pierce the vital organs of their victims.
- Bald eagles have the greatest weight carrying capacity of any bird. Eagles are different from many other birds of prey because of their larger size, more powerful build, and heavier head and beak. Most eagles are larger than all other raptors except vultures.
- An eagle has a storage pouch in his esophagus called a crop, where he can store about 15% of his weight in food. Sound in the form of screeching is produced in the syrinx, since eagles do not have vocal cords.

- Bony extensions of the eagle's skull form a prominent brow that overhangs the eyes, shielding the eyes like sun visors, reducing glare, protecting them from injury, and providing keener vision. Eagles have eyelids that close during sleep.
- Eagle's eyes are fixed in their sockets, so they have to turn their heads to glance around. Eagle's eyes have a million light-sensitive cells per square millimeter of retina, five times more than a human's 200,000. While humans see just three basic colors, eagles see five.
- Eagles have two foveae, or centers of focus, which allow them to see forward and to the side at the same time. The term "eagle-eyed" originated from the eagle's sharp eyesight. Eagles blink by closing the outer upper and lower eyelids like we do.
- Like all birds, eagles do not have external ears like we do. Their ears are small holes on either side of the head back behind the eyes. They are under the feathers so are not visible unless you look for them. Eagles have excellent hearing.

## THE EAGLE'S BEHAVIOR

- A bald eagle's nest may reach ten feet across and twenty feet deep. An eagle's nest is generally built in a wineglass shape.
- An eagle will usually migrate to the same nest each year and immediately begin adding new materials such as branches, grass, moss and sticks. The largest eagle's nest on record was in Florida, measuring 30' across and 20' deep, and weighed about 4,400 lbs.
- Surprising articles found in Eagle's nests: a 25-foot rope, a bleach bottle, a broom stick, a copy of *THE AMERICAN WEEKLY*, a family photograph still in the frame, a full skirt, buffalo ribs, gunny sacks, neon bulbs, old shoes, pink panties and sea shells.
- Bald eagle nests are constructed with large sticks, and may be lined with moss, grass, plant stalks, seaweed or sod. Because they need to land into the wind, an eagle's nest must be approachable from several different directions.
- While building the nests, the males will usually excel in gathering sticks while the female remains at the nest-site receiving and strategically placing the sticks, and treading down the moss and straw.
- Bald eagles often nest in cliffs, mature or old growth trees, rock promontories, snags (dead trees), and with increasing frequency on human-made structures such as communication towers and high-line poles ... but rarely on the ground.

- Bald eagle nests have been found: in a hayloft of a barn on the Niagara River, on a bare rock in the middle of a Saskatchewan River rapids, on a giant cactus in Baja, California, and even on the ground of a high bluff.
- Bald eagles require nesting sites, perching areas and tall trees overlooking estuaries, large lakes, reservoirs, rivers or seacoasts, where they can observe a good food base. Seldom will an eagle's nest be more than two miles from water.
- A high nest provides the eagle an excellent position from which to monitor his territory, greater protection for his young, and an energy-saving launching pad. Eagles literally jump off their perch and swoop down to gain speed before climbing to the sky.
- If an eagle's nest is destroyed due to a fallen tree or storm, the nest will usually be rebuilt in the same general vicinity within a matter of weeks. Because eagle's nests blend in so well with the backdrop of trees they are often difficult to see.
- Most eagles respect other eagle's territories, but when living conditions become crowded there can be property disputes, which is why a pair of eagles will build a nest and keep maintaining it and returning to it year after year, generation after generation.
- An eagle's nesting range (fifty to one hundred acres) will be vigorously defended against all that enter it. Because the female bald eagle is two to four pounds heavier than the male, with larger talons and beak, she will confront other female eagles that stray into her nesting territory, and the smaller and more agile male will challenge male eagles in territorial disputes.
- Bald eagles that nest in southern latitudes frequently move northward in late spring and early summer, often summering as far north as Canada, while most eagles that nest at northern latitudes migrate southward during winter, where waters remain unfrozen.
- By fitting eagles with radio-transmitters, researchers show that northerly nesting bald eagles may cover 1,200 miles when migrating to the south for winter. Eagles recognize no human boundaries but are extremely territorial in regards to their nesting locations.
- Bald eagles typically return to and enlarge the same nest each year, but they may also have one or more alternate nests within their breeding territory, which is usually within 100 miles from the place where they were raised.
- Both people and eagles like to build their summer homes on shorelines, which results in conflict. Although humans like to be close to eagles, eagles do not want to be close to humans.

- Eagle eggs are about the size of a baseball. They are white to beige in color with a matte finish. The shell is fairly thick and can take the adult weight, particularly if they are laying on a soft surface like the nest lining.
- Eagles have strong bonds to the area where they hatch and fledge. A newly bonded pair may work several years on a nest before actually breeding. Eagles spread their wings to intimidate intruders if they are disturbed while in their nest or on the ground.
- Some eagles are fairly tame after learning there is nothing to fear from humans, while others get extremely upset and become so frustrated that they stay away from their nest so long that the eaglets die of starvation or their eggs fail to produce due to exposure.

## **PARENTING**

- Most eagle's nests (aeries) have been built, maintained and repaired by generations of eagles from the same family and have served as nursery, dining room and gymnasium for dozens of eaglets.
- While the female incubates the eggs, the male will search for food and continue building up the nest to provide a higher outside perimeter for protection, and then the male will sit on the eggs while the female hunts for food and branches.
- An eagle's eggs are a speckled off-white or buff color and are laid several days apart from one another. They usually take 35 days to hatch. At times the female will lie down over her eggs for fifteen minutes to an hour without moving a feather.
- Incubating eagles generally stand up about once an hour to stretch and change positions, turn the eggs over to keep the embryo membrane from sticking to the inside of the shell, and poke around in the nest material to provide surround heat for each egg.
- A mother eagle will tuck her eggs gently underneath her feathers as she settles to brood. While brooding, an eagle will sit with raised breast, but once the eggs are hatched the eagle lays flat and low in the nest.
- A mother eagle, while brooding over her young in the midst of the storm, is not frightened by it, but rather challenged; still her instinct to protect her young is greater than her impulse to desert her responsibilities.
- Adult eagles take great care not to step on their eggs or chicks by clenching their great talons into harmless balls and carefully placing them so they will not ac-

cidentially harm their little ones.

- Eaglets are almost solid brown when hatched. Eaglets add one pound of body weight every four or five days and are one foot high in three weeks. Eaglets hatched in tree nests are twice as likely to survive compared to eaglets hatched in nests on ledges because of the greater number of predators, and heat stress caused by hot rocky ledges.
- Heat stress is dangerous to eaglets, so on sunny days the mother will spread her wings slightly and turn her back to the sun in order to provide as much shade as possible for her little ones.
- An eaglet has a special “egg tooth” on the front of its beak that it uses to break through the shell of the egg, and then the tooth falls off ... something evolution cannot explain. An eaglet’s bony little beak tooth will remain for about a month before it falls off.
- It takes the eaglet about 24 hours from the time he first begins pecking the inner walls of the shell to the time when he finally hatches from the egg. There will be a consistent peeping coming from inside the egg 24 hours prior to hatching.
- An eaglet emerges from the egg blind, helpless and wet. An eaglet is indeed “an ugly duckling” with big dark circles around both undeveloped eyes, a wobbly head, with all the tools to become a mighty eagle but no knowledge of how to use them. When the eaglet first hatches he is covered with a fine white down that is gradually replaced with feathers.
- Eaglets feud, fight, fuss, scrap and squabble with each other just as other siblings do. They bite, flap their wings, lunge forward to peck at each other, make loud screeching threats, and show their talons ... all naturally inherited behavior for raptors.
- Like any baby, an eaglet’s life is centered on food, digestion and sleep. As soon as they are able to stand, the juveniles will back up to the rim of the nest to defecate, and they will almost never defecate in the nest again.
- As the eaglet loses its body fat it becomes more agile and starts hopping around inside the nest flapping its wings ... always careful not to get too close to the edge. An eaglet learns to fly by hopping from one rim of the nest to the other, then stretching his wings and flapping them, then jumping up and down.
- Because of the quality and quantity of food, combined with the comfort and safety, eaglets mature at a much faster rate than most birds. Consequently, eagles have been observed nudging their eaglets in order to get them to try their wings.

- Eaglets are able to stand in five weeks, are nearly as large as their parents in six weeks, and develop their greatest appetites in eight weeks. The first eaglet to hatch has a head-start in size, so by the time the next eaglet hatches a pecking order has been established.
- In only 10 to 11 weeks, juveniles are fully feathered, capable of flying from the nest, and are on their own about a month later. Eaglets must learn quickly to fly because of ever-present dangers such as nest predators. An estimated 30% of eaglets die from bad weather, disease or predators.
- Because the nest is such a natural dining room, it is difficult for the parents to feed their eaglets if the young bird falls out onto a branch or craggy rock. Many do not survive the first year after hatching.
- Eaglets grow quickly. Over the course of three or four years, the juvenile's bill will transform itself from light brown to bright yellow and his eyes will turn from light yellow to pale yellow. Juvenile eagles are a medium to dark brown with white on their under-wing linings instead of on their head or tail.
- At nearly 98% of their adult size, a juvenile eagle takes their first flight about 75 days after hatching. Instinct alone is not enough for an eaglet to learn to fly . . . he must have a mentor. They must be taught how to dive, glide, hunt, land, soar and survive. After a few rough landings the juvenile will eventually learn to land into the wind.
- The juvenile eagle quickly learns that flying and preying are two different things and that he must learn how to abort a dive, calculate his speed and descent, fly against the wind, gather intelligence before attacking, maneuver into position for the kill, and use gravity.
- Banking into (not with) the wind, cruising (not crashing) to a stop onto the branch of a tree or cliff of a rock, and landing in (not past) the nest, are some of the more difficult things a juvenile must master while learning to fly. His first flight from the nest will be more like a glide and the parent will reward his efforts.
- Occasionally, the juvenile will land on the ground while learning to fly, which is very dangerous, but usually they attempt to land on a branch or a rock like the parents do.
- Many young eagles do not survive flight school.
- Eagles are faithful parents – defending, feeding and sheltering their chicks. Parents will feed their eaglets three to five times a day. About 85% of a chick's diet will typically consist of fish such as carp, white sucker, shad, bullhead and sunfish.



- In the early days the mother eagle's attention is given to her eaglets while the male hunts for food. If, for some reason, an eaglet refuses to eat, the mother eagle demonstrates great patience, attempting time and again to feed it.
- In a nest containing two eaglets, one fish is brought every three hours during daylight hours fed to them one strip at a time. Life in the nest is a life of leisure for the eaglets that have nothing to do but eat and sleep ... but soon flying classes will be in session.
- Because juvenile eagles do not have the strength or knowledge to tear into a fish, the fish is usually brought to the nest headless so they can eat it. Both adult eagles use their hooked beaks to tear off small pieces of meat to feed their eaglets. The young are directly fed raw meat from the day they are hatched.
- Adult eagles often swallow snakes headfirst and leave the tail hanging out of their beak so that when they arrive at the nest the eaglet can safely grasp the snake's tail and pull the entire reptile out of the eagle's crop.
- An eaglet will eat as much as it can at a single feeding, storing food in its crop. The crop, an organ located near the base of the bird's neck, will enlarge as it fills, resembling a golf ball. Eagles do not regurgitate food like some other animals do.
- The male eagle is basically the hunter and provider while the female plays a more dominant role in matters relating to the eaglets and the nest. The mother must tilt her head in order to transfer food to the eaglet from her fiercely hooked beak.
- As the eaglets grow, so do their appetites, so the parents must hunt from sun up to sundown in order to nourish and satisfy them. Bald eagles can consume about two pounds of flesh in a single meal and so can their juveniles.
- Because eaglets are hungry all the time, the parents will stop feeding them on a regular basis as they grow older and instead fly close to the nest with a beak of meat as if to dare the young bird to test his wings and fly.
- An eaglet's first kill will usually be a bug that has invaded the nest. Self-feeding is a developmental milestone that begins when the chicks are around 40 days old.
- Most juveniles stay within a mile of the nest and eat mom and dad's leftovers for six to eight weeks before flying away to start their own lives. Once they learn to fly, juveniles range up to ¼ mile from the nest site, often to a site with minimal human activity.
- Although young eagles do not follow their parents during migration they somehow know where to go. With no young to feed, juveniles can fly farther to find food, though they often rely on scavenging.

- While migrating, juveniles make frequent stops in “rest areas” where there are food sources, take more time, and tend to wander; whereas, older and more experienced eagles focus on making the final destination as soon as possible.

## **FLIGHT**

- Usually, migration season begins in December, with the eagles returning to their nests in late February. Southern eagles migrate north to escape extreme summer heat. Immature eagles have been known to migrate greater distances than adults.
- An eagle cruises at 20 to 40 miles per hour and can reach speeds of 100 to 150 miles per hour while diving. Bald eagles have been sighted at an altitude of 10,000 feet and their hunting range varies from 1,700 to 9,000 acres.
- Thermals are strongest during the warmest part of the day and are scarce over open water, resulting in migrating eagles following the narrow land corridors and flying in the early afternoon. Active flight is with slow, powerful wing beats.
- The eagle is the only bird known to man that will fly directly into a thunderstorm. Eagles appear to be at peace in the midst of a storm. They have even been observed flying in hurricane-force winds.
- On a clear day a high soaring eagle can see districts, villages and towns in one brief glance; forests, lawns, meadows and swamps at a glimpse; and sly, small, stealthy animals that humankind does not even know are near.
- On calm days, eagles usually perch because the air is still and there are few rising air currents on which the eagle can soar. Smaller birds waste energy searching for food while eagles are free to perch and conserve energy, because they can secure food at will.
- Migrating eagles use updrafts and wind to help them soar with minimum wing flapping, thereby conserving precious energy. In the lower 48 states, Washington has the highest number of migrating eagles, with second place going to Missouri.
- Eagles prefer rugged terrain because of the creation of abundant updrafts. Long distance flights are accomplished by climbing to great heights using a thermal (rising currents of warm air generated by rough terrain such as mountain slopes or valley edges), then gliding “downhill” to catch the next thermal, where the process is repeated again and again.
- Heavier eagles start hunting later in the morning and stop flying earlier in the afternoon because of the need for strong thermals. Sometimes rain can also ham-

per a heavier eagle's ability to fly. Heavier eagles normally spend more time perching than flying.

- Heavy rain can sometimes prevent eagles from soaring because they are dependent on the lift provided by thermals. After an exceptionally heavy rain it is not uncommon to see an eagle perched and drying out by facing the sun in an open winged position.
- If smaller birds such as crows or hawks harass an eagle, he will simply catch a thermal updraft and soar to a higher altitude, leaving his problems behind.
- Eagles can cruise for hours at a time. An eagle has the ability to descend by (1) dropping like a lightning bolt out of the sky, (2) gliding steadily downward, or (3) tilting his wings vertically so as to side-slip to lose altitude.
- Eagles can swim short distances, but if the water is too cold, they may be overcome by hypothermia. Sometimes eagles will wade through shallow waters for weakened salmon. Occasionally eagles have been known to get so wet that they could not fly.
- Eagles choose their migratory routes to take advantage of thermals, which are more prevalent in the spring. Eagles do not migrate because of cold weather but to find better food supplies. Not all bald eagles migrate.

## **SOCIAL SKILLS**

- Eagles communicate with each other through a variety of high-pitched screeches. A bald eagle's repertoire of calls or songs goes from squeaky alarms used in territorial encounters to grunts and wails used in aggressive situations.
- Eagles do not play well with others, but have been observed diving with other eagles. In winter, eagles like to congregate near dams where rivers are kept flowing and are free from ice. They gather only when they have to, due to a localized abundance of food. Otherwise they primarily fly alone, confident in their abilities, capabilities, defense and strength.
- Eagles are solitary creatures and unsociable in their character, but they will flock with other eagles if there is a plentiful food supply. An eagle is territorial primarily because he wants to protect his food supply. As a result, they are also inhospitable when it comes to sharing their favorite perch with other eagles.
- The Bald Eagle mates for life, but when one dies, the survivor will not hesitate to accept a new mate.

## HUNTING AND FEEDING

- Eagles depend on unfrozen lakes, rivers and streams for accessible food supplies. Generally, bald eagles will migrate south in the winter when frozen lakes, marshes and streams in the north limit their access to food supplies.
- Bald eagles are classified in the “fish eagle” group of eagles, with fish composing 60-90 percent of their diet, but they also feed on carrion, rabbits, turtles, snakes and other waterfowl. They can be found in every state except Hawaii.
- Bald eagles fish in both fresh and salt water. No fish = No eagles. They love fresh fish, especially salmon. They must be precision dive-bombers. Eagles don’t mind getting their feet wet but they try to stop short of diving into the water.
- Only one eagle will dive at a time when six or twelve eagles circle over a school of fish.
- Because eagles are visual hunters, they typically locate their prey from a conspicuous perch, or while in flight, then swoop down and strike. Most victims of eagle kills never knew what hit them.
- Spawning fish are windfalls for bald eagles. Though they often scavenge, eagles will readily kill live fish and other prey, including birds and mammals. Because of his massive size, the eagle is not fast enough in flight to overtake his prey, so he chooses to dive down from above.
- The bald eagle is an opportunist and will sometimes steal fish from an osprey or crow. But ospreys have been observed stealing fish from young eagles as well. Some non-English versions of the Bible translate “eagle” as “vulture.”
- Seldom will an eagle attempt to catch and carry more than one fish at a time. If an eagle is having difficulty dragging a large fish to shore, it is not uncommon for other eagles to help him, and for their trouble he allows them to take part of the spoil.
- On occasion, eagles will team up to catch other birds. Eagles sometimes roll over on their backs while diving, and then thrust their talons upward into the breast of a duck or goose. Bald eagles rarely take on evasive or dangerous prey by themselves.
- When bald eagles hunt together in small groups, one eagle might land on the ground and walk through tall weeds to flush out ducks and geese for the others.
- If a bald eagle catches a fish so large that he cannot lift it out of the water, he will hover just above the surface and row himself to shore, using his wings as paddles and pulling the fish with him.

## MALES, FEMALES & MATING

- A bald eagle has few enemies because of his size and is not concerned about threats from other birds. His life is, for the most part, centered on his food supply, his mate and his nest.
- A bald eagle reaches sexual maturity and selects a mate at four to five years of age. Once paired, bald eagles remain together until one dies. Eagles mate at a specific time of year so their young will be ready to fly when winter comes.
- A pair of eagles will rarely migrate together; rather the male will usually precede the female by four to five days. Sometimes male and female eagles hunt together though, approaching their prey from opposite directions.
- An adult female eagle will weigh 8 to 15 pounds, measure 3 feet long, and have a 6 to 8 foot wing span. A female may be 30% heavier than a male, and her wing-span is longer than his. A female eagle's beak is also longer than the male's.
- Before mating, the male and female frequently perch side by side nudging, pecking and stroking each other's back, bill, head, neck and shoulders. Eagles are most vocal when calling their mates or declaring their territory.
- If a female eagle wants to catch a husband, she will carry a stick high up into the air and drop it near a prospective male who, if interested, will swoop down, catch the stick, and return it to her.
- Instead of bringing his mate flowers during courtship and incubation, a male eagle will often bring her green branches with which to reline the nest. The eagle's most spectacular aerial feats are reserved for each other during courtship, at which time they demonstrate awesome power, skill and speed while performing mock battles and spectacular dives.
- While courting, and prior to mating, eagles will swoop upside down toward each other, presenting open talons and fall together, talons locked together, through several hundred feet of space until, at last, they break apart and lift themselves upward on heavy wings.
- It is no game when male and female eagles lock talons and fall through space together ... they are "exchanging their marriage vows." Mating usually occurs on the ground after the pair has tumbled downward through the air with claws interlocked.
- Once male and female eagle mate, they will hunt, nest and raise young together, remaining together for life. Bald eagles do not mate with the same gender.
- When they have "love spats" the female will either ignore him or show aggres-

sion by fluffing out her feathers, then leaning forward and lowering her head she will begin such a loud obtrusive call that eventually he will leave the nest for awhile.

## **ADDENDUM IV**

### **LEGENDS, TRADITIONS & PRESERVATION OF THE EAGLE**

*“The heavens declare the glory of God;  
and the firmament shows His handiwork..”*

**-PSALM 19:1**

- Ancient folklore, legends and myths have credited eagles with extraordinary, sometimes frightening powers – even the most powerful – that of creator. In Roman mythology, the symbol for Jupiter, king of the gods, was an eagle clutching thunderbolts in his talons.
- The ancient Aztecs associated the daily journey of the sun with the flight of the eagle; rising on the warming morning air and swooping down out of sight at night. The cliff on which an eagle often landed dictated to them the place where they were to build a city.
- An eagle can only carry three to five pounds at most, making the myth of eagles carrying off human babies, calves or sheep just that – a myth. An exception to this is the Harpy eagle which has been known to carry off monkeys.
- Eagle feathers were considered by most ancient cultures to be powerful and valuable possessions, and were important in healing rituals and in war. Egyptian priests wore elaborate eagle masks while performing certain special religious ceremonies.
- Eagles are admired the world over as living symbols of power and freedom. They appeal to both genders – women think they are beautiful and men think they are macho.
- Delaware Indians believed in a guardian spirit that soared far above them in the form of a great eagle and that by flapping his wings he could create thunder and by blinking his eyes he caused lightning.
- Eagles have an all-American magnetic allure that appeals to everyone: animal lovers, astronauts, athletes, celebrities, educators, environmentalists, Harley riders, Native-Americans, the military; rich and poor – young and old ... and Christians around the world.
- In ancient folklore, eagles could fly to and from the sun, carry on a conversation

and interact with people, transport spirits of departed warriors to the heavens, and visit kingdoms of other worlds.

- The Romans believed that if a general saw an eagle before a battle he would be victorious.
- To many Native American tribes the eagle's feathers symbolize everything brave, holy and strong and are to be worn always with dignity, honor and pride.
- Native American tribes of North America considered the eagle sacred and used eagle feathers to decorate their ceremonial clothing as rewards for acts of bravery performed in battle. In some religions, high-soaring eagles are believed to be able to touch the face of God.
- Native Americans honor the eagle by dancing around a fire with shoulder to fingertip eagle feathered wings and a sweeping fan shaped tail in the back. Some people in Siberia used to place wooden eagles on poles in front of their houses to drive away evil spirits.
- Indians in the Northwest carved the figure of an eagle in their totem poles to represent a spiritual relationship between their families and these impressive predators.
- Some ancient Indian tribes believed that a circling eagle with widespread wings was an omen that meant good crops, prosperity and success in hunting. The word "thunderbird" originated from North American Indians and described a mythical super eagle.
- The eagle has been called "The King of Birds" and is "The undisputed ruler of the sky," making him the emblem of freedom, valor and victory. Eagles are bold, brave, independent, proud, strong and wise ... and careful to avoid danger.
- Greek coins dating back to 413 BC were stamped with the images of eagles.
- The bald eagle on America's Great Seal has a bundle of arrows in his left talon symbolizing the power of war, an olive branch in his right talon suggesting peace and liberty, and a scroll in his beak which alludes to the union between the states.
- The American Bald Eagle (representing freedom and victory) was formally adopted as the U.S emblem on June 20, 1782. Without a permit issued by the Secretary of the Interior, it is illegal to "capture, collect, disturb, hunt, kill, molest, poison, pursue, shoot, shoot at, trap, or wound a bald eagle."
- The Eagle Act, enacted in 1940, provides criminal and civil penalties for persons who "barter, export, import, offer to sell, possess, purchase, sell, take, or transport at any time or any manner, any bald eagle alive or dead, or any part, nest, or egg thereof."



- The first gold coin to carry the eagle's image was the "Eagles" (worth ten dollars) and the "Half-Eagles" (worth five dollars) minted in 1795. The first U.S. non-gold coin bearing the image of an eagle was the Massachusetts Copper – 1776.
- At one time it was fashionable to collect eagle eggs as a hobby. The pastime of collecting eagle eggs, feathers and talons was quite popular and respectable, until people learned that they were endangering the eagles.
- Bald eagles have died from lead poisoning after feeding on waterfowl containing lead shot as a result of hunting. At one time eagles were considered marauders and perceived as a threat to domesticated livestock, so farmers and ranchers put bounties on their heads and hired professional hunters to kill them en masse. Eagles have survived decades of persecution and pesticides.
- Some companies and countries are progressively seeking ways to protect eagles. The bald eagle population is on the rise in the lower 48 states.
- Some eagles live year round in northern preserves. But those who do migrate, usually only travel as far as they have to in order to find food.
- Men and women, who climb up to eagle's nests to attach I.D. bands on the eagle's legs so they can better track them, are called banders. If a bander finds a disabled juvenile he or she will take it to a bird shelter until it can grow strong enough to survive in the wild.
- If a bander is attacked while in the nest, he hopes it will be by the male rather than the female because the female is ruthless. More often than not, it is by the juvenile, because the juvenile is trapped with nowhere to go.
- Banders sometimes take landowners with them when they visit a nest, to give landowners a greater appreciation and understanding of eagles.



## RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY ON EAGLES

- Best place to see a Bald eagle up close: AMERICAN EAGLE FOUNDATION at Dollywood in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, where hundreds of injured or orphaned Bald eagles are tended to, bred and released – Al Cecere, founder and president, [www.eagles.org](http://www.eagles.org).
- Best website on eagles: *THE AMERICAN BALD EAGLE INFORMATION* website by Hope Rutledge, [www.baldeagleinfo.com](http://www.baldeagleinfo.com). Thanks in part, to excellent websites like this, our view of eagles have changed from “evil” killers to “good” rulers of the sky.
- For a beautiful love story between an eagle and a man: “Eagle’s Kiss.”
- Best book on eagles: *Eagles: Masters of the Sky*, by Rebecca L. Grambo.
- Public access websites were used to research information, like the ones mentioned above, as well as:
  - National Eagle Center: [nationaleaglecenter.org](http://nationaleaglecenter.org)
  - The Center for Conservation Biology: [ccbirds.org](http://ccbirds.org)
  - Defenders of Wildlife: [defenders.org](http://defenders.org)

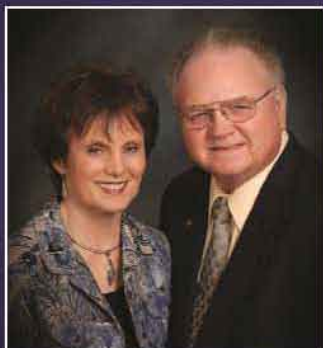


## **YOU WERE MADE FOR MORE.**

Numerous times in scripture, God likens Himself and His followers to eagles. Why? In this book, you will discover how God made the eagle to be a protector, a warrior, a soulmate, a teacher and an over-comer. While the eaglet finds warmth under the safety of his mother's wing, that same wing can stretch more than six feet across and rocket through a storm to soar above it.

Joe Garman, veteran prison evangelist and missionary for over 42 years, outlines with personal stories and biblical truths, the journey an Eagle Christian embarks upon. Learn how God made you to do more than struggle and barely get off the ground.

He made you to SOAR!



### **JOE and LINDA GARMAN**

**of ARM Prison Outreach**

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**This book is perfect for personal devotion  
as well as small group study.**