



Interwoven Through Time

INTERWOVEN THROUGH TIME

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Preface

Interwoven through Time Four separate journey's one common goal. To be truly free

Stop! Just think for a moment where are you right now? Yes physically, but even more emotionally and spiritually. How did you get there? No really. What all had to happen in your life, in others lives even in the world to make things just the way they are right now?

You see through all our lives many common threads are being drawn. Like a divine wind of change, driving before it the unseen purposes of an all-knowing creator. Time and distance are of no consequence in this foreordained pattern sewn eloquently into the ever-expanding quilt of eternity. Each of us continually and usually unknowingly is experiencing the result of this process. Being interconnected though a constant sequence of seemingly unrelated events to people we may have or maybe never will meet. These ongoing dramas are forever being acted out on a God directed stage, forming the very fabric of life, as we know it. We are not and never have been alone in our lives. We are who and where we are for a reason. Though we can often feel trapped or abandoned, paralyzed and fear stricken, crushed and even broken, it is not without a purpose or without a God inspired reason. Our struggles always have a goal beyond the current moment and a lasting affect on far more in ours, and others lives', than we can ever comprehend.

This is a story of four such lives and how they, through the annuals of time, come together on that God directed stage. Your life may also now become part of that tapestry of eternity as you read and hopefully relate to these four people and their walk toward being set free.

We immediately catch a glimpse of how the storms of life having taken their toll on our four characters. Are you there too? Can you relate to the pressures and frustrations of life bearing down on you? Your hopes and dreams crushed and broken and at times nothing but hopelessness seems to exist.

First we meet Leonard, having been a vibrant young boy full of hope and dreams like yours. Now afflicted with a life changing illness that leads him to where we find him, drowning in his sorrow and shame. Then there's Chase, whose tender caring child like heart has been all but buried and forgotten behind the unmerciful cruelty of his demanding military life. Looking further, though separated by time, distance and culture, we find our other two characters dealing with their own struggles of life. Ron ever seeking but never finding that promised paradise around him or really even a reason to feel of value at all.

Then lastly we come upon the shattered spirit of a crushed and broken little girl living inside a woman without a glimmer of hope for a better tomorrow. Lucy's heart wrenching dream of ever just being loved somehow always seems just out of her reach.

So our stage opens with self-reflection by each of our characters. We will follow each of them on a trip back to their childhoods seeing the foundations' being laid for each one's trying life to come. Their hearts are laid bare before us, as we see each in their own way pushed forward by an unseen force toward the answer to their sorrows. Yet at the same time held fast by their ever-present condition which is a direct result of their own troubled past. Until at last we see them challenged and changed. Interwoven through time into the tapestry of life. Being finally set free.



Chapter 1

Where am I really?

The park seemed extra quiet this crisp frosty morning. The darkness seemed unwilling to release her hold and the stars glistened brighter than they normally should. But as with every day, the morning light would once again win its battle with the ever-present pull of darkness. It broke through slowly at first then light overran the retreating darkness of the night. Its brilliant rays at first hurt Leonard's eyes as it pierced through the heavy darkness in these early morning hours. He quickly pulled his hood up to provide some badly needed shade then stretched his aching body out on the cold hard ground. Even though this small amount of sunlight hurt his sleep filled eyes, its warmth was such a welcome blessing after the long chilly night under the stars. Soon its warmth gave him reason to smile if even just for a moment.

Then looking around, he searched to see if all his possessions were still there. He had so little he could still call his own. He wondered each night if these too would be lost to the darkness, as had everything else he once held precious. All he had left was a thin blanket, leather pouch, plate and cup he had recently found while rummaging through the local garbage pile, the clothes he wore, and most precious of all his worn out copy of God's precious word. Once a product of wealth and importance, having almost anything he wanted, he now had only these few possessions, which he carried with him daily rolled up in his blanket. He had long since abandoned or had stolen all the other special things he had taken when he left his loving home and family, so many years ago. He let out a long sad sigh as this thought lingered in his mind.

His eyes now peered through the misty morning sunlight, to see if anyone might be coming. Seeing no one, he rose and relieved himself against a nearby bush. Moving quickly back to his sleeping place he settled back down for a bit. Looking again at his belongings, he grabbed the leather pouch from its partially hidden spot. Opening it ever so carefully, so as to not lose even a crumb, Leonard carefully pulled out his last piece of dried out bread. Taking his time now, as that was all he had and knowing not when he would eat again. He slowly ate the stale dry bread, savoring every bite as if it were a hot cooked meal his mother might have served in happier days gone by. When he finished he pulled himself firmly up by the lower branches of the tree he had slept under the night before. Once on his feet, he walked slowly to a nearby stream. Dipping his cup in cool flowing water, he raised it to his mouth and washed down the last remains of the stale bread. Leonard sighed as he swallowed that last drop, letting his mind wander again as he did.

"What a life," he thought, "sleeping outdoors each night under the stars, no one to bother you or tell you what to do. Hanging out at times with others who were just like you, forming your own special community. A child's dream of independence and freedom and adventure." This was just the thing that, as a boy, he always dreamed of doing. So why was this a nightmare he found himself in, and not a dream? How had he gotten here and why? What happened to all those promises, all those unfulfilled dreams? Oh yes, he could almost hear his father's soothing voice saying, "Oh my Leonard, my Son, you're so very special. God has promised to bless you and make you a blessing to many". He went on to tell him, how he and his mother had asked God's blessing on him as well as, his brother and sister. All seemed to go just as planned through all his younger years. What a happy young man he had been, growing stronger daily. Leonard had loved to play sports and go exploring with the neighborhood boys making each day an adventure worth sharing with all who would listen. Oh, how he missed those days. His mind was suddenly jerked back to the present by the sound of nearby voices. Crouching low, he caught what to him was a terrible sight, a group of people and they were coming his way. "Now what?" he thought. Hide again in shame or test their mercy and seek a small handout? He thought to himself, so this is what he had become? Was this the life he'd been promised or had it all been a lie? What had he done? What could he do? Was this all there was?

Leonard looked again at the approaching people and chose this morning to fade away into the shadows and hide again. Moving back beneath the tree, he gathered his things and sunk slowly into the undergrowth. He felt self-pity start to grow within him, as he sat hidden in the covering of the undergrowth. He opened up his blanket. His eyes looked for his most prized of all possessions. With it, in hand, he looked longingly down at his copy of God's Holy Word, and wondered if there was really any hope in there after all? How was he even able to still believe there was a God, let alone think He cared a thing about mankind and especially himself? He unrolled it slowly being careful not to tear the pages. Struggling to even finish reading, tears filled his eyes. How could he have once thought this was for him? Yet as he read from the book of Jeremiah, the same words that had once before jumped out at him and pierced deep into his heart, did so again this cool misty morning. "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile."

Leonard thought, Oh Lord there in the middle of your talking about your people having been carried away in exile by you, you promise you still care. He pondered that thought and drew hope from it. In the recesses of his mind, he said to himself, "God still cares, even though I live in the midst of this storm. Even though He has carried me away to my own exile. I believe there is a reason. He has not forgotten me. I am not here alone." Though everything around me screams, "You're a loser, Leonard! You're not wanted, Leonard! You don't belong Leonard!" God whispers from the shadows, "Leonard, I Love you. You, my precious son, are not alone." The thoughts warmed his soul and actually brought another smile to his wind burnt face. He opened his eyes again and looked around to see the same emptiness that had haunted him moments before. Now though a new spark seemed to burn within him, sorrow still gripped him tight like the morning darkness though a light seems to be piercing through. He hung his head and wondered, "If Your word is true Lord then how and why did I end up here?" His closed his tired eyes again as his mind started to wander back to better times, happier times, hoping maybe that would help him get a better grasp of why his life had come to this and maybe just maybe why God wanted it so...

You sit alone beneath the tree, hearing not a sound,
Searching within for a reason If one can be found.
For this ever-present sorrow that you're now living in,
Even for your purpose in life and what it's never been.

How can one go from happiness and never-ending bliss?
Then in a moment's time, you end up in a place like this?
"It's just not fair," you scream out loud,
Worthlessness is what you feel, where once you were proud.

The wealth is gone and so your friends did go
A handout they had sought, not you to get to know
The glory's all but faded now, the darkness settles in,
Your once bright happy face has grown so pale and thin

One final glimpse of greatness passes with the night,
Any memory of happiness seems to slowly fade from sight.
Alone there in your ugliness, alone in your sorrow deep,
The hope that once burned within, you're now unable to keep?

But as you look around, you see you're not alone,
The other's there with you, the world did too disown.
They wander just like you, in the shadows of the day,
Not wanting to offend normal people along the way.

You're castoffs all of you, removed far from the rest,
Did you all do something wrong, or somehow fail a test?
Do you even know what it is you did or maybe didn't do?
What does one do or not do, to end here like you?

One thing that you notice, as you look upon your state,
In all your present sorrow, you have not such a different fate.
As those, the world calls normal, yes the ones, who cast you out,
You both dwell in your brokenness, even as you walk about.

For just like you they're crippled, but they've chosen not to see
Living in there lavish houses, they're as proud as they can be
Yet there's no joy to be found, in their cold and broken hearts,
You see this race for riches, has all but torn their lives apart

So is there hope for any, is it because you're weak or strong?
If riches aren't the answer and yet poverty seems wrong,
Then where on earth is any hope, is true hope just a dream?
No, there is a hope I tell you, but strange as it may seem.

It's already inside each of us, for it's how our lives we live,
It's not based on what you get, it's in a heart that gives.
For when God lives within a heart, then hope will never fade,
In that place, its safe my friend, for sorrows can't invade

So seek the Lord with all your heart and once you have laid hold
Never let go of His promises, no matter what you're told.
Don't let your circumstances ever determine how you feel,
For in this world there's only God and He alone is real.



Chapter 2

Who am I really?

"Morning already?" thought Chase as he rubbed his eyes and rose to face another day. He sat quietly for what seemed hours watching as the bright morning sun chased away the last shadows of the night. The cool morning air was always so refreshing. This morning it seemed even more so as it was just what he needed this after the grueling day of battle he had experienced yesterday. The hard life of a soldier takes its toll on a man's body as well as on his spirit. Every facet of your life is affected by the cruelty you are faced with each day.

Chase let his thoughts wander as he sat there quietly. This life he lived was such a contrast anymore. On

the outside, he was a man looked up to and literally feared by those under his authority. Those above him though seemed totally satisfied with the methods he used to accomplish his requirements as an officer. He had become such a powerful force in their eyes. Yet his view of himself was quite different. He had always done his best, excelling where he could, digging deeper and pushing harder than others when he had to. Lately, though he had felt such a pull from inside, an awareness that this was not what life was truly all about. Each brutal success brought with it a greater sense of cruel emptiness. Chase's thoughts raced back and forth as this conflict raged on inside him. His mind was jolted back to reality as he heard the sound of voices just outside his door.

Rising slowly, he prepared his mind for the day ahead and all it held in store. As his hand reached to open the door, it opened as if on its own. There stood Jason his longtime friend and now assistant. "Can I get you coffee, sir?" Jason quipped with his childlike smile. Chase responded with a quick, "Yes I could sure use that this morning." Jason just kind of stood there smiling while Chase raised one eye, "What's up?" he thought, "Why is he looking at me this way?" Jason grinned and pointed to his own cheek near his mouth. Instinctively Chase's hand reached for his own mouth. He shook his head in embarrassment as he felt the dried drool that was crusted at the corner of his mouth. With a quick shove and a smile, he sent Jason on his way commenting how this better not end up a joke amongst the soldiers. Jason didn't even look back as he laughed and hollered, "Now would I do that to you, sir?" Chase mused to himself how many times this friend had saved him from himself and sure embarrassment over the years.

He walked on through the door with that thought still on his mind and likely clearly displayed on his face. He almost knocked someone over as he did. Looking up his smile quickly faded, it was Clyde. This man could steal the joy at any moment. His heart was truly cold as ice. He gave intimidation new meaning. Clyde glared at Chase and said, "Do you ever watch where you're walking." Looking straight into Chase's eyes, as if ripping at his heart he said, "You're just not the same anymore, are you? What has happened to you?" He went on for what seemed like hours, telling him, as always, how their job was to be strong and unapproachable, cruel when needed, and never ever seen as weak or soft. They needed to be as close to inhuman as possible. There was no room for smiling, crying or feeling anything if they were to succeed in their role. Clyde and Chase, you see, had come up through the ranks, as it were, together, always pushing each other to be more intense than ever. Sometimes even causing Chase to totally forget who he was and only focus on becoming more of what those around him wanted him to be. They both now held the same position of leadership and were equal in authority and responsibility. Lately, though, each had taken a different route and different stands. Clyde never let Chase doubt for a second what he thought of his new choices and even more lately. Clyde looked deep into Chase's eyes as if trying to read his mind. He said, "Do you even want to lead anymore or have you lost your nerve?" Chase glanced back as they parted ways wondering, "Is he right? Can I do this job anymore?" The words, "what has happened to you", rang in his ear and burrowed deep into his heart. From deep inside he heard these words again, but this time more pleading than condemning "what has happened to you". Where was this voice coming from? It was as if a distant almost lost past was reminding him of who he used to be. Should he even consider it worth listening to? Or was this powerful controlling person he had become the right way to be? It seemed daily he struggled with those thoughts. He hoped that it wasn't as clear to his superiors as it was to Clyde.

Around the corner, coffee in one hand a pastry in the other, and the forever goofy smile on his face came Jason. He stopped short, as he sensed the pain in Chase's face. This was not the man he had left only moments before what had happened he thought. He had seen this so often lately and knew there was a great battle that raged within his master's heart. Unlike Clyde, he would constantly tell Chase what great changes he had made. Jason had observed first hand the outward changes affected by this inner transforming pull. But who was he to counsel his master? In fact, as he told him how much he appreciated the new man he saw coming out in Chase uneasiness arose within his own heart. He owed this man so much and would do anything for him. He loved his job of catering to his every need. He was able to live out daily his heartfelt

appreciation for this great and powerful man that he had come to work for and become friends with. Jason's heart also broke as he watched the battle rage and also grew to fear for his boss. Handing him his coffee and his pastry they both let smiles creep back onto their faces. If but for the briefest of moments they just enjoyed the friendship that was theirs. The world and its problems seemed to gently fade away. Yet the burning question would soon return still unanswered, what was in store for Chase? What was to become of this man living two distinctly different lives?

Life is only what you make it,
What you grab for is what you get.
Isn't that what we've been told?
Is it truth or a bill of goods we're sold?

You fight and claw up life's never-ending ladder,
But you find no joy; in fact, you're even sadder.
Now you're watching out for number one,
So why are you not happy, when the day is done?

Prove yourself again today; you'll still end up where you start,
You always try to act their way; yes you always play the part
But with each passing test, there's another one that's left to do
You've grown so weary of this life you know it's not for you

Yet this is what you have been taught,
It's the prize we all have sought.
To seek the world's acceptance, to look good in their eyes,
Yet do we ever get it or we just reaching for the skies?

As doubt begins to grow, you find you can't resist,
The feeling there inside you, which continues to persist
For in this life that's ever changing, your eyes begin to see
Things you have been taught aren't the way things that ought to be.

You find you're only happy when deep within you look
No longer to conform, you're not living by their book
Other peoples good, has become your strong desire,
Where there once was only coldness, you begin to feel a fire

This fire flares up inside you maybe only now and then,
Still, as it passes, your mind remembers when.
The battle didn't rage and the world couldn't see
the difference in the life you live and the way it was meant to be?

Once you thought you knew, all there was to know,
Now you're not so sure and it's begun to show.
Those who once thought you to be so brave and strong,
Now avoid your company, so are you right or wrong?

Is it really for this world, that a man suppose to live
Is it for you or others that your time was meant to give?
Is all the truth you've ever known, yes all that you've been taught.

Is it of any value or has all you learned worth naught?

Can one really gain a life by giving it away?
Is there really such a path as this, did we all just astray?
My eyes have begun to open; my heart has begun to lead
I want to live no more for me, but for what others need



Chapter 3

Faded Paradise

One by one the lights shut off as darkness lost its grip. The rays of sunlight rose through the valley fog and danced on the morning dew. Now the sun warmed the air as Ron meandered down the lane this lovely spring morning. Ahead of him stood the shiny new pole shed, gleaming in the morning sun. He glanced around at the beauty in which he dwelt. It seemed God created a masterpiece of splendor, a paradise and placed him in the middle. His heart should burst with appreciation for all he had. A house that looked more like a mansion than anything he ever imagined himself living in and a beautiful wife. Yes, all the wonderful things a wife should be, plus three young loving boys at home. This ranch with its own splendor and beauty, overlooking a valley that opened into lush meadows and a flowing stream that beckoned one's senses to take it all in. Add to that his childhood dream to raise horses. Ron was also his own boss with a successful company that gave him both financial and personal freedom. Respected in the business community. Ron also stayed involved in his church. Where he and his perfect family attended each Sunday with engaging smiles and warm embraces. They became the envy of so many who desired to become all that Ron and his family was.

As Ron walked that morning, like every morning, with shoulders slumped, and head hung low, fighting back tears. He said to himself, "Where is my joy? Where is my happiness? Where is the fulfillment this world promises? "I have it all," he muttered and shook his head wondering, "What's my problem? Why such emptiness and despair?" Ron shook it off and walked on realizing he had no answer for this pain. He finished the morning's task and looked back toward the house.

Even though it seemed early, the sun had already risen, casting its beauty upon the landscape before him. He looked at his watch and realized that time passed faster than he knew. The family dogs were greeting him as he stepped up on the front porch. Each one wanted to attention. As he turned and opened his front door, he

was taken back by the sheer size of this house. Why again did it need to be so big? Seth hearing the door open and ran screaming jumping into his dad's open arms. A smile graced Ron's face as he and Seth shared a moment of unspeakable joy. His stupid self-pity drained away, as a flood of excitement took its place. Like a glass being shattered that moment passed. Without even looking up, he heard Jane confronting him. His heart ached within him as he again understood that scripture, "Love covers a multitude of sin". He also understood that the lack of love found fault in everything you do. Jane made it clear years ago that love no longer existed in their relationship and maybe never did. He would now again have to learn what a failure he was. In time he grew to believe it and saw himself as a failure and unwanted. This caused such sorrow to grow within him because for years his very existing drew from popularity and acceptance.

Crushed, Ron buried his face in Seth's warm neck holding back the tears and doing his best to ignore the cutting words spoken. From around the corner came Tobias and Trevor, his other two sons' from Jane. All three boys were full of so much life, an exuberance that was contagious. This brought Ron's mind back into focus and a smile again burst upon his face, as the four of them wrestled to the ground. Each vied for his attention and gave his life momentary meaning. This too was short lived though as the day's routine kicked into full force. The boys, having eaten and dressed, waited patiently for the school bus. Okay, okay, they're boys, so patience played no part in that or any other morning.

Ron called them to the base of the stairs as Ashley appeared from the basement. It was time for family devotions, yet someone was absent. The boys hollered, "Mom you coming?" Jane hollered back over the roar of her hair dryer, "I will listen to you from here!" They all looked at each other and shook their heads. She was getting all dressed up to go work at a barn. Hair just right and looking far more like she was going out on the town for the night than to work at a barn.

The reality settled in like a heavy fog. This family was not well; trouble was crouching at their door. Ron started the devotions, but it was so hard to put his heart in it. When he finished, the boys rushed out the door to get on the bus waiting out front. Ashley slipped back downstairs to finish getting ready for school. Ron headed to the garage, looking back hoping Jane was there to say goodbye. He drove away wondering what happened to him, his family, and this place people called paradise.

Is paradise, but a state of mind
A place you seek or a place you find?
What kinds of things should we find there,
How can we know or should we care?

The world assumes it is and says it will be,
A place of real contentment that exists for you and me.
Where all our hopes and dreams come true,
We will do the kinds of things, we've always wanted to.

No pain or sorrow we are told, will ever there exist,
Possessions are too many, for any book to list.
I'll have it all, when paradise is mine,
All that is now wrong in life will be fine.

A lovely family there will be, very strong and sound.
Lush green grass in every yard where happy kids are found.

And love, yes love is present everywhere,
For in this paradise no one has a care.

But wait I thought I had all that, at least the world said,
Let me look again where was it I read.
That man can have it all and have it here on earth,
Some, I it's even said, have it right from birth.

Possessions oh yes were mine, in fact was quite a list,
But pain and sorrow were mine too yes they did both exist.
So where again is this paradise, that I believed was mine,
It wasn't like they promised life wasn't always fine

I had a family this is true, but its was neither strong nor sound,
The grass wasn't always green and heartaches seemed to abound
The kids were there, they would soon learned to cope,
To live in a home that's always fake and lacking any hope.

So where's the hope they promised, where are all the dreams?
Something's wrong here; my life isn't what it seems.
The love that should be present, isn't found there anywhere,
In fact there's none to found, when our hearts are laid bare.

There can be no paradise, where love isn't found,
Ugliness grows wild where beauty should abound.
So why and how did it leave, oh where did it go?
Can anyone answer me, does anyone know?



Chapter 4

Lost, alone and looking for hope

Darkness reluctantly gave way as the sun's rays crept ever so slowly higher and higher on the bedroom wall as its warmth radiated through the window. Lucy seemed in a daze as she watched the golden rays march up her wall, then turned suddenly to her right for fear Stan was still there, her own breath bursting forth in a sigh of relief, breaking the silence of the moment.

She found herself shuddering at the thought of his touch and how it sent shivers through her body. Lucy lay there for what seemed like an eternity as she wrestled with the desperate feelings that tormented her mind.

Fighting back the tears like she did every morning. Reluctantly she rose to another day of hopelessness and despair. What had she done, how had she gotten herself and her children into this mess? Now what could she do or was this all life had to offer? Had hope for anything better completely vanished? She glanced at the mirror while passing on her way into the bathroom. Who had she become?

Most women would be so pleased to have lost so much weight, yet Lucy knew this was but another cursed result of her hopeless state. She was a beautiful woman on the outside, desired by many, yet she hated who she was on the inside. Where was God, had He followed her into this living hell or left her to find her own way out?

Shaking her head and regaining her composure Lucy rinsed her face and fought to put on a happy

exterior for her children's sake. She went off to wake them, thus beginning another day of acting. A weird smile graced her face as she thought to herself about her Oscar deserving performance acted out daily to an unknowing world around her. While dying inside she showed the world a woman who really never had existed and most likely never would. Somehow she even fooled herself at times, as she had played so many roles throughout her life. She had, you see, forever tried to be someone she wasn't, as someone else, anyone else had to be better than who she really was. Wait she had to stop, if those thoughts grew, she would not be able to move. She had to put on the front and go on. "Shake it off," she said to herself, "this is about the kids not you. After all you deserve this life, they don't, now get going."

Jacob was already up and around as usual, busy eating he looked up and smiled as his Mom passed by. Lucy went on to get Jolynn up, knowing that she moved very slowly in the morning. Then it was on to Trent, as he needed extra help because he had Cerebral Palsy. Lucy looked at him as she woke him remembering how many times she had almost lost him over the years. There was such mixed emotion within her, joy to still have him mixed with sorrow as she remembered how his trials had always been faced by her alone. These thoughts only added to her feeling of emptiness. Yet in him was also such a reason for being. In fact so many times it was his total need of her alone that let her go on just one more day and then another. How many times had she thought, "If he didn't need me I would so check out of this life"? What could be worse than this, I am living in a hell here on earth already." Trent looked up and smiled, her thoughts rushed to being that Mom her children needed and she moved on with her routine.

Back to Jolynn, as she knew she would find her just where she left her moments before, in bed back asleep. She woke her again, this time staying there until she actually placed both feet on the floor and stood up. Lucy looked at her precious daughter and somehow found it worth all this mess to keep on fighting for her.

Less than a year ago Larry, Jolynn's dad had kicked them all out. He had done his best to turn everyone Lucy knew against her, even her own family, cutting off, as it were, any logical way to escape her current captivity. So here she was, where she shouldn't be living, in a life she never wanted.

"Mom!" Jolynn said stumbling into the kitchen rubbing her eyes almost tripping over Trent, who had fallen trying get to a chair for breakfast. Jacob and Jolynn giggled loudly, as they helped Trent back up to his feet. He told them he could have done it alone and pushed them away as he settled into his chair. Even so such a warm feeling rose up in Lucy that finally an unforced smile came to her face. She stood there watching her children laugh and interact. After all, this was her only goal in life, giving them some resemblance of a normal and happy childhood that she had never had.

Jacob responded to her beautiful smile with his own as he grabbed a bowl and some cereal for Trent. He had become mom's main helper and, in some ways, the man of the house. This seemed good, but sadly this too had become unhealthy, as it also was Jacob's identity. His dad's unwillingness to even give his own son his last name had left this young man scarred. Outwardly a happy vibrant engaging child he hurt deep within. His help was always welcome though, as this allowed Lucy to finish getting ready.

She glanced at the clock anxiously as she always waited until the very last moment possible to wake Jonathan. Just like all of them, so much pain dwelt below the surface in this young man. Like Lucy in so many ways, he fought to find a reason to even live. Lucy never meant to but with no help, she had unknowingly given so much attention to Trent over the years. His CP and resultant life threatening seizures, taken on alone by her seemed to dominate her life.

Jonathan her second oldest son, had so often felt alone as he struggled with a sense of resentment

toward Lucy and Trent. His dad being so non-existent that an alter ego personality had unknowingly risen within him to deal with this feeling of isolation. Try as she could Lucy was now unable to break through to Jonathan. He had put up such a wall around his heart, a form of self-protection from his pain. Lucy approached his bed with a sigh, feeling she had so let him down and was now powerless to change what they both had become. A sense of failure flooded over her added to her morning emotional roller coaster ride of the morning. She leaned down to wake him and as expected he woke glaring up at her giving his usual smart comment about her not needing to get him up. She swallowed hard, turned and walked away blocking out the other hurtful comments thrown her way as Jonathan got himself up and around. Her heart broke as she walked down the hall. How she wanted to go back through the years turn this all around. She wondered if she had ever felt more alone, more lost, more helpless or more worthless and without hope.

What's lurking in the shadows, hidden in the mist?
Is it just my imagination or does something there exist?
It matches now my every step, invades my every thought.
It knows my comings and my goings so how can it be fought?

I never see it though I know it's always there,
I feel its power here in fact I feel it everywhere.
I'd pull away as if I could, then I would start to run,
But it's still here with me as if we two were one.

Even when I think it gone, it's never far away,
Why does it torment me? Why did it come my way?
It coldly steals the joy that really should be here,
Even when my precious children are drawing very near.

For even then it's able to grab a hold of me,
Its cold touch I feel, it's form I cannot see.
Is this some kind of monster that holds me strong and fast?
Oh! At last I see just what it is, yes it's my painful past.

Of course it knows me, oh yes it knows me well,
My failures and my sins it continues to retell.
It's grown in strength you see, as it's been there all along,
And now it dwells so close to me it's like a long sick song.

Every verse is filled with suffering, each note another pain,
Shame, guilt, and anger are its constant sad refrain.
And when I think I've buried it in the recesses of my mind,
It comes to life again in me, more bad memories it does find.

Oh what can free me from this anguish that continually I feel?
It's not a monster this I know but its effects are just as real.
I know it soon will take me down if I have to stay like this,
Has my life already passed me by, is there something that I missed?

Was there another path, could I have gone another way,
Did I ever have a chance or did I just badly stray?

Is this the life I'm given, am I left here now to cry?
God if you do exist, then let me ask you, why?



Chapter 5

How did I get here?

Leonard lay on the hill near his house watching as one by one the stars seem to burst into the sky. He glanced quickly at the horizon catching the last shimmer of red light that marked the passing of another day. A smile suddenly appeared on his face. His heart seemed to overflow with happiness as the thoughts of his simple but wonderful life filled his mind. Leonard even giggled out loud as he recalled the wonder of his day and the sheer joy of just being alive. He bounced to his feet and headed off toward his nearby house. Throwing a rock into the darkness he ran gleefully down the hill toward home.

When he rushed through the door the overwhelming smell of freshly baked bread reminded him of his empty stomach. He had forgotten everything, including his hunger, while lost in his evening's adventure. His little brother and sister jumped from the table and rushed to meet him, both talking at once. They so wanted to hear all their hero had done and how he had used the freedom that they so desired. One day soon they would run free with him and share the adventures of his wondrous childhood. Leonard smiled lovingly at his mom, as he led the two little ones back over to the table telling them passionately of the excitement and joy that had been his that day. How he was laughing and playing with friends for hours on end, even exploring a nearby cave pretending to find hidden treasures and slay menacing creatures with wooden swords. His beautiful and gentle eyes grew even bigger than usual, as he shared how he had chased a rabbit till his legs almost gave out, even falling headlong into a field of flowers. He grinned excitedly as he pulled a couple of lovely but crumpled flowers from his pocket and handed them to his mom. She shook her head and laughed aloud as she hugged her little adventurer, thinking how blessed her family was.

Leonard's father cleared his throat, from where he had been sitting quietly almost unnoticed at the far side of the room. He had so enjoyed taking in the excitement that always flowed so freely from this happy loving child and sensing the warmth that so permeated the whole room. He slowly rose and joined them all at the table, messing up Leonard's hair as he passed, winking and giving him that look that says well done my son. Leonard's dad now calmed the room by simply taking his place at the head of the table looking deep into the eyes of his waiting family. He brought their focus to the food laid out before them, the roof over their head, their health and just the fact they were all there together in a loving home. He glanced at Leonard and asked if he would do the blessing. What an honor, as the acknowledgment of God's blessing on this family was a very special thing.

After his brief reciting of a couple verses from God's word, Leonard said amen and they all began to eat. Leonard looked around and thought to himself, "Wow how blessed I am, this is truly how life was meant to be." Dinner ended with everyone feeling full and satisfied. Then the children began picking at each other becoming restless and bored sitting around the table. Leonard's mother began to clear the table, with the attempted help of his little sister, as he and his brother went to sit at his father's feet. They both settled in near the chair where his father had adjourned. A look came over him, as one about to share something of the utmost importance. "Boys," he said, "Take not lightly the promises and blessings of God." He went on to share selected portions of God's word, reading at last from the Prophet Jeremiah. Leonard could almost hear God speak to him personally as his father spoke these words, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future". "Wow!" he thought, "My life is going to be so great, just like dad had always told me." His father had many times said of Leonard, that he was very special and was going to walk in God's favor all the days of his life. His mind had wandered and now he again focused on his father's words. Now as his father finished, he realized he was far more tired than usual. Asking to be excused he quickly headed off to bed. His mother and father looked at each other a little quizzically, as this was not like their high-energy son. He always stayed up for family time that followed fathers teaching. Even so, they gave their blessing as he headed off to bed.

As the morning sun peeked through the open window, Leonard's parents sat sipping their morning coffee. They soon exchanged the same questioning look they had both shared the night before. Where was their Leonard? The boy that always beat them both out of bed and who normally stood fully dressed before them wanting his list of daily chores, so he could finish early then hurriedly head off into the world for another of his wondrous days of adventure. That thought itself brought a grin to both their faces. What a zeal for life that boy of theirs had! Their joyful thought was cut short though, as into the room now walked or more like shuffled their special son. Not with any of the bounding energy they were used to. He slowly, almost laboriously, moved toward them as if straining to even move forward. It seemed somehow not due to lack of energy. No, it was more like a strange brokenness had overcome this child and sadly shown all over his face.

He now stood before them looking down, somehow daring not even to look at them. His mother reached for him, but strangely Leonard quickly pulled back. With obvious fear in their voices, his parents said, "Leonard what's wrong?" He slowly raised his eyes to meet theirs, tears beginning to flow. He then reached down to open his robe. The room fell silent as a tomb; both parents' eyes at once beheld every parent's deepest fear. For there on their precious son's chest were the signs of the dreaded sickness, which had become a curse throughout their land. This condition that stole the very soul from a man and caused him to become a cast out from among his people, even his own family. Was it true? Could it be? What about all those promises? Leonard thought to himself "what about God's word, he felt he had clearly heard even last evening"? He slumped down in a chair, as his father slowly, but deliberately left the house. He soon returned with one of the city leaders. The man walked directly over to Leonard asking him to again open his robe. The look on his face was all the answer anyone needed and not the one anyone wanted. He had the condition and needed to be removed at once from the house and from the city, no delay and with no contact.

Even as these words were being spoken Leonard's sister and brother came bounding into the room heading straight for their beloved brother. Without hesitation their mother intercepted them swooping them up in her arms. Leonard turned to face them as his father, who had gone to get his belongings, reentered the room. The children strained to pull free as they sensed something wasn't right. Tears streaming from Leonard's eyes, he quickly took his belongings from where his father sat them. He spoke of his love and accepted the same from his family, then turned to follow the city official. Believing fully he would most likely never see his family again. What was to become of this young man, so full of energy and life? Had God allowed his life's dreams and purpose to be lost in a moment in time? Could he, or should he, believe a word of what he had heard of the love of God? Should Leonard curse God who he once thought Holy and Pure or just curl up and die? Was there any hope, any reason to go on? Then something deep within him, as if a small voice whispering through the darkness said, "Leonard hold on, you are not alone, you are not alone! I have not let go of you". With that, he slowly walked into the shadows that would become his home for many years to come.

The stars they seem to shine just for me,
The moon is as full as it can be.
My life is perfect, like in a dream,
I am so blessed or so I seem.

To be the apple of God's eye,
I never hurt, I never cry.
I'm living what he promised me,
I'm living proof now can't you see.

I look around and ponder this,
Why do his blessings others miss?
Have they offended God above?
Are they not like me in His love?

Even as my thoughts soak all this in,
My life seems strangely not what it's been.
There's pain where before none was felt,
My happiness to begins to melt.

What is this sickness that has overtaken me,
It clouds my eyes, makes it's hard to see.
Where's my blessing, where's my dream?
Where's God's leading by His stream?

Have I sinned, have I done wrong,
Where is my faith, I once thought so strong?
I've lost my family, lost them all,
I stand-alone now, how did I fall.

Should I go on or just give up,
Is this my lot is this my cup?
Should I drink deep of sorrow and shame,
Should I look within or without for blame?

God says, "Be still my son you're not alone,"
I made your flesh, your blood, and your bone.
I know the condition that you're living in,
It's not from wrong; it's not from sin.

This is my choice and this is my way,
My command to you, hold fast today.
The reason is mine, I will reveal,
Remember only, my promise is my seal.

Now live your life seeking not my hands,
Wondering not, where your blessings stand.
But seeking me and only me,
And accept my choice of what you'll be.



Chapter 6

Who had I become?

The street lamps seemed to shimmer in the growing darkness coming on one by one almost like chasing away the last remains of sunlight which danced quickly down the empty street. The vibrant young man loved

to watch this nightly ritual as it marked the end of another exciting day in his blessed life. His days seemed so simple, so carefree. Little did this sweet little boy know what life soon had in store for him. With a twinkle in his sparkling blue eyes, he ran into the house to find his dad. He had to tell him how the sun had danced away again that night and all he had done throughout his day. As he went skipping and smiling down the hall toward the family room he could hear the sound of voices faintly before him. He slowed now as he drew closer to the door not making a sound. He came to a sudden halt though, as he heard his mother from the other side cry out in a loud voice, "No!! You can't let them take Chase!" Gently pushing the door open he heard his father's deep voice say, "This is his calling, he is old enough to start his training now." Just as his father spoke the door's hinges squeaked out an announcement to all of Chase's presence. This caused his mother crying to increase and his father to change his compassionate expression to that of instant sternness. It was then that Chase first caught sight of the powerfully built stranger who stood just beyond his parents, like an ominous silhouette.

His mother dropped to her knees. She threw her arms out beckoning Chase to come forward. He ran and threw his arms around her neck and held her tight as his mind tried to grasp what was going on. His father's fought to stay devoid of emotion while pulling his son from his mother's firm grip. Just then, the large stranger stepped out of the shadows placing his strong hand on Chase's shoulder. Looking straight into the child's eyes with a glare that pierced deep into his very being. Chase's mind so wanted to escape to the time earlier in the day. When he was running happily through the streets and wrestling with the neighborhood boys. His eyes even glanced away for a moment as if to find a way of his escape. Yet somehow he knew in his heart that wasn't possible, in submission he slumped beneath the stranger's grip. "Stand up lad," he heard a deep voice growl. He looked up in instant acknowledgment of this man's authority. He spoke with such forcefulness that one knew instantly not to even think of disobeying. His father quickly stepped back with unquestioned respect. The man's voice boomed again as he spoke to Chase's father this time. "You understand he leaves tonight and becomes the property of the state?" He went on to explain how Chase's life would no longer be his. The state would now decide his comings, his goings and set a course for his future. With that, his mother let out a final muffled whimper seeming to no longer be willing to challenge the stranger's wishes. With her emotions in check, she did all she could do, which was to watch and wait. His father too seemed to have taken on a posture of complacency releasing total control of the moment to the stranger, whose focus again fixed firmly upon Chase. The man said, "I am Officer Bertrand and you will go with your mother now, pack your belonging and report back to me at once. Is that clear?" Chase instinctively said, "Yes Sir". With that Chase rose and walked with his mother in silence from the room.

They walked together speaking not a word until they finally reached his room. Chase opened the door and let his mother enter first. Barely had he set a foot in the door when his mother broke down completely. Letting all her held back tears flow freely yet keeping any sound from coming forth least she be heard. Chase just held her looking at her as a child seeking answers to a question he never ever before considered. "What was going on?" he thought, "I am from a rich family, a very well known and respected family, how can this be? My parents have always loved me and taken care of me. Never allowing anything to threaten my well-being. Now my life seems shattered. Am I really to go with this man? Will I ever see my family again?"

His mother finally stopped sobbing looking longingly into her precious son's gentle searching eyes. She told him all that had happened and what was ahead. She explained how all the sons in their region, whether born wealthy or born poor, were being taken by the state. More specifically for training and preparation of a life in military service. He was being drafted. This was considered a great honor yet not without great sacrifice as well. She told him how proud his father was of him. Explained how just before he had come in the room, his father had been bragging of all Chase's victories in the local sporting events. This was of great interest to the officer. Added to Chase's natural birthright as one of the wealthy, his strength and athleticism gave him the promising potential to excel in the state's service. Somehow this seemed of little importance to Chase at the moment. He was far too shaken by the events of this evening to care a thing about any thoughts

of a promising potential.

The two talked lovingly over memories as they selected those belonging that could go with him and even found a couple moments for laughter to be mixed in. With everything stashed in a large bag, they headed back down the hall, exchanging silent glances as they walked. Somehow knowing they might be sharing their last moments together. Both sought to block those thoughts though not wanting in any way to taint these last memories together. As they approached the door they could hear the two men inside talking. They opened the door and both men became instantly quiet turning to face them. Officer Bertrand stepped forward with what almost seemed like compassion in his eyes he told Chase to tell his parents goodbye and meet him outside. Turning quickly he walked out the door never glancing back fully expecting to be obeyed. Chase looked at his dad who finally showed a slight tear as he reached out for his son. The three held each other tight for a long time, and then suddenly his father pulled away and took on the sternness he had shown before. He told Chase he needed to obey and get going. Chase moved slowly towards the door glancing back as he went. They both told him they loved him as he disappeared through the door and effectually walked out of their lives.

It was clear his life was never going to be the same again. This officer now showed no emotion as he ordered him into the back of the wagon. So began his life of military service. Quickly he learned he had no life of his own and no value aside from serving the state. The officer seemed very pleased as he watched this gentle-natured young man daily transformed into a heartless military machine. Excelling in the qualities of a hardened soldier he quickly moved up the ranks. His intelligence added to his natural physical abilities helped him not only survive, but also actually surpass all he was asked to do. Still, something inside him cried out every time cruelty was expected or more like demanded of him. He had learned to obey without thinking or worrying about how or what he did affected anyone else except his superiors. Chase grew more influential in their eyes. Yet as he did that gentle caring person he once had been seemed to almost completely fade away. Killing and controlling had become second nature now. He had finally become all Officer Bertrand had envisioned that fateful day so many years ago in his parent's house. He had now become one of the most proficient warriors. Chase rarely gave a thought of the man he had become. Yet he was about to come face to face with an enemy he had never been trained to fight. This enemy was himself. He would find himself fighting a back and forth battle between who the world had made him to be or getting back to who God had created him to be.

The peace and innocence oh yes the joy,
It lives within every little boy.
The world's his playground,
Where true happiness is found.

Yet one day he wakes there to find,
A different world one not so kind.
All that was sacred and so secure,
Is ripped away, life's no longer pure.

Yet deep within is the memory of all,
His childhood happiness he tries to recall.
When a day was filled with happy sounds
There this little boy grew by leaps and bounds

And he'd then run home to share his day,

And tell his parents how he did play.
Just how he won but all in fun,
Wanting most to be their loving son.

His memories are growing dim,
Who is he now? What's become of him?
His heart's grown cold, his muscles strong,
He's winning still but something is wrong.

The peace within is all but lost,
Crushed innocence is another cost.
And joy has long since washed away,
Evils growing stronger every day

It was hard to think of that little boy,
When he now crushes out others joy.
This has made him a cold and heartless thing,
Now his winning has a deadly sting.

So how have they succeeded here?
By taking love and replacing it with fear.
But can a loving heart ever truly die,
Or will it someday reject the lie?

That ripped away all that was right,
and there within begin to fight.
Will the flame of love begin to burn?
As for the past, it starts to yearn.

Will someone, something affect your view,
Make you think about what you do.
Make you face yourself and see,
That you are not what you were made to be.



Chapter 7

Shattered Dreams

Little Ron's eyes glistened, as they peered through what remained of the days fading light. The sun dropped out of sight, bringing another day to a close. Happiness was shone in those sparkling blue eyes of his. He smiled, that special smile, as his mother reached out for him. Oh how she loved her little four-year-old bundle of energy. What a special bond was theirs, even with five other children, that she also loved. His mother swooped him into her arms and held him so close. "Ronny" she whispered, "Mommy and Daddy and Aunt Sally are going out tonight. Aunt Lana is here to watch you guys." Ronny pulled away and his mom wiped a small tear away from his bright blue eyes. Sadness came over his innocent little face.

His brothers and sisters joined them and together they said goodbye to their loving Mom. "Oh my precious children," she said, "don't worry I will be home soon, I promise. Haven't I told you guys many times, I would never leave you?" With that she hugged them all and a giggle burst forth from Ron that seemed to fill the whole room. He had a way of doing that. His happiness was so contagious it seemed to make even the cruelty his father showed, tolerable by all. That special bond he and his mother shared somehow let him live outside the yelling, the hitting, they always having to perform or suffer for it, life. She put him down and gave a quick smile to them all as she disappeared out the door and into the waiting car.

Ron turned now with a wink of those twinkling eyes of his. This little four-year-old ran headlong into the midst of his brothers and sisters laughing as he did. In their innocence they couldn't know it would be the last time to see their beloved mother alive.

Later that night they were all awoken from what seemed a peaceful sleep to the sound of crying adults. All around there was heaviness in the air that made it hard to even breathe. Ron only picked up bits and pieces of what his brothers and sisters, being older and more understanding than he. "A car accident," he heard, "She's dead." "Who's dead?" he wondered, "And what's that mean?" Something grew inside of his little heart and he pushed through everyone to Aunt Lana. Now seeing Aunt Sally with her. His little eyes, no longer glistening, darted back and forth from empty face to empty face. He blurted out above the noise of the room, "Where's my mommy? I want my mommy!"

Silence filled that room like a cloud for what seemed like forever. Aunt Sally dropped to one knee and looked in the little boy's eyes. "Mommy's not coming home Ronny, she has gone away to a better place." A look came over Ron's face now that no one had ever seen before. With the attitude of a child far older than four he said, "No! That's not true mommy promised me she would never leave us." Those words cut like a knife through every mother in that room. You could hear the pain, sense the fear, and feel the desperation in this little boy's voice. They all searched deep inside, but none could give to this child a word to break the devastation that overtook him.

This started a chain of events in Ron's life that would forever mark him. Abandonment seemed to follow him from this point forward. Without his mother's assurance, the performance-based acceptance his father so pushed became his measure of success. He lived his life this way and sadly judged others the same way. He trusted no one; he found it hard to build relationships with any real depth. Wanted no one to hurt him like the loss of his mother did. He somehow never forgot how she broke that promise she gave so many times. "If this is love, I want none of it", he said, and found none of it existed in his life. Yet love, true love was what his heart so sought and needed.

This wanting love, but never being able to accept or recognize it led to several broken relationships and many painful divorces. Somewhere though, in the shadows of his heart, still lived that little boy and his loving heart. That boy, who wanted to show love and receive love, now searched for answers, but from where?

Silence broken by laughter sweet,
A child playing at your feet.
You find you're now laughing too,
Not caring at all what the others do.

His happiness affects us all.
He touches people both big and small,
Within him lives a love so pure.
It seems somehow to be the cure.

For all the sadness we see,
And all that's wrong with you and me.
Its innocence and love complete,
He affects all he's apt to meet.

But with suddenness this innocence is lost,
That little heart now broken has paid the cost.
Yes lost is the source of its power,
That warm and sweet heart is now cold and sour.

What once filled others hearts with glee.
Is empty now how can this be.
Did it die, this love within?
Can it come back will it live again?

Was it based only on the things outside?
What made this love, hide?
Within the recesses of a broken heart,
Is it still there or did it depart?

People avoided not wanting them to know,

If they get to close, your emotions might show.
Even as love tries to break through day to day,
You wonder how can you even go on this way.

You know there's an answer, but it's not clear,
Yet sometimes you sense it's very near.
Just out of sight, just out of reach,
Will anyone show you, can anyone teach?

A way to make that love grow strong,
You feel your fear and know it's wrong.
But to walk again with a heart of love,
It'll take a healing that's from above.



Chapter 8

Childhood without hope

The last glimmer of sunlight fled from Lucy's room. She chased the sparkles of light that remained to her sister's delight. These two laughed and giggled as nightfall took full form. Only shadows could be seen as these two little girls fell off to sleep dreaming of all the special things little girls dream of. This night however would be the beginning of a childhood of nightmares their days of dreams were over. For there in

the shadows was an evil Lucy could never have imagined. Its form moved slowly but steadily toward her. Lucy just sat there unable to move, wanting so badly to run, to hide, but she was paralyzed. This five-year-old little girl, you see, was trapped. Sadly though not by some strange force, not even by some stranger, but by her father.

She tried to sneak further down in her covers, but soon learned this was of little help. He came to take her like he would so many times in her childhood, down the cold dark stairs behind that horrid bar and do to her things no little girl should ever experience. Sadly she was not alone; she later learned that she shared this fate with her sister and even her brothers. This monster knew no limits, knew no bounds. Most little girls love when they are their daddy's favorites, but not Lucy that just meant more sick abuse by this vial man. "What was she to do? Where was she to turn?" she thought so many times. Who could or would deliver her from this living hell?

She finally tried, with her sister, to reach out to her mom for help. What a mistake that was. Not only did she not believe them, she made them sit all day until their dad came home. He took Lucy to the side and told her "I own you now, no one will ever believe you. If your own mother doesn't believe you, who do you think ever will?" He went on to tell her she was a pitiful child, "God looks down on you and laughs," he said. "Don't you understand your sole purpose for living is to be used?" What a lie from the pits of hell. But this was her father it must be true. No matter how Lucy tried to forget them, those words rang in her ear and planted an unholy seed within her that would grow and grow. That lie has held Lucy captive for years.

From that point on she knew she was trapped. Fear now held her fast feeling more paralyzed daily. It was her master it controlled all she thought and did. Until, slowly guilt and shame joined fear and filled the very recesses of her heart. She hid when she could. Left home as early in the morning as she possibly could, stayed away as late as she could, but it wasn't ever long enough. Then came the shadows of the night. Sin truly lives in the shadows of the night avoiding the revealing light and ruling the darkness. Sleep seemed to almost never be an option. She waited and watched that door fearing it would open and his silhouette would be there in the shadow of the doorway. Thank God not tonight, but he would be back again over and over and over. In time anger began to grow in her and hatred slowly took over for fear. She wasn't sure which she hated more, the person she was becoming or the man who made her that way. She knew it couldn't go on, if she could turn to no one else she would turn to the only one she could trust, herself.

One typical night she stared at that door as usual, but this time something was different. A rage rose in her she had never known before. She almost looked forward to him walking in as he soon did. She remembered hearing herself say, "You touch me again and I'll kill you."

Now fear was gone for good and anger ruled, plus vengeance was always on her mind. Shame and guilt always lurked in the shadows keeping her from making friends or letting anyone in close. What a childhood, or actually total lack of one. Almost to the day of her 18th birthday she gave herself a present of freedom. Lucy walked out the front door of their house for the very last time. She heard her mother scream, "You get back here you hear me, you owe me!" Lucy turned one last time and said, "No, you owe me a childhood."

"Life must be better away from here," she thought as she walked away. She never noticed that she had a terrible companion as she walked down the sidewalk that day. Totally unseen to those around or even by her, but it was there just the same. Hideous and menacing seeking to devour and infect all she would ever do. This monster was Lucy herself. She had become what she hated, an angry heartless cold person. What was sadder still was unseen to her that sick seed planted so many years ago had grown and now had a strangle hold on her. Every relationship she would ever have, every loser she ever met and married, was affected by those words '*your sole purpose for living is to be used*'.

What was the future for this young woman? Was her life over before it ever began? Was there even a reason to go on living? Sometimes she thought not. Yet somewhere deep down inside was something, something that said, "Lucy there is more, you have never seen it, but it's there. You've lived this long when by all rights you never should have...why? Take another step, now another one, and again." She could almost hear a whisper in the early morning breeze, "a change is coming my little girl, a change is coming, just hold on" and so she did.

A child's innocence is simple and pure.
Never meant for such sorrows to endure.
Should be a sweet foundation, to a young life.
Full of joy, but never this much strife.

Little ones are God's gift from above,
To be cherished cuddled and shown true love.
So how can evil live in there,
Sadly though it isn't rare.

Yes in the homes of those who are so unstable,
But what of those who seem so able.
Like the middle class with families sweet,
To those who live on golden streets.

There is no place that's safe or secure,
No place one can say now this is pure.
A child can be a slave in any of these,
and have done to them just what they please.

As we live quite unaware,
Of the pain and sadness endured in there.
By little ones so helpless, so scared,
Why aren't they saved, why aren't they spared?

This life of sorrow, sadness and pain,
Affects their life and their hearts does stain.
So that all they touch while growing old,
Living out the lies that they've been told.

What can be done to break this trend?
What can we do, how will it end?
If we open our eyes to the things that we see,
And not be afraid, to say this can't be.

Little ones need us; you know that they do,
What if it was your child, what if it was you?
We have to speak up and look with our eyes,
And see in their face when we can't hear their cries.

Let's start to ask questions, you know we must,

Let's not look away and just kick the dust.
Let's save one of them and then let's make it two,
But it takes me and it takes you.



Chapter 9

Something more, something so much more

The scorching heat of the noonday was barely lessened by Leonard's sitting under the large sycamore tree. But there he sat, feeling such an outcast and isolated, though he was certainly not alone. A number of women and children had gathered there as well for they too were not allowed at the large gathering taking place very near them. The children stared at Leonard with wondering eyes. There he sat, hood up and face covered, fully robed while they shed any clothes their mothers would let them, to get relief from this heat. They pointed and giggled as they scurried about. He tried hard not to notice, as that only caused his grief to grow.

Thankfully his attention was soon completely focused on the man who stood in the center of the men gathered nearby. The slight breeze was not only refreshing in this heat, but it seemed to help carry this man's voice to his desperately straining ears. Oh if he could just draw closer, he thought, somehow even at this distance, his words were so clear they actually rang in his ears. This man's words seemed to pierce his very heart give him hope, even in his current state. What was it about him? Was it what he said, or the way he said it? No, it was something more, something so much more. Leonard just couldn't explain it, but when this man spoke, new life seemed to burn within his dying body. He wanted to jump up throw off those robes and run headlong into the crowd and get as close as possible to this man. If such power was in his words what more must even be in his touch. In fact, power seemed to just flow forth from him, Leonard could barely see but people seemed to be drawing closer touching him.

He squinted his feeble eyes trying to make out the man now limping ever so slowly up to the speaker. He knew this man, yes it was Samuel, the kid he remembered living down the street, who had been crippled from birth. He recalled how he always pitied him and yet now he was so envious of him. He watched in amazement as Samuel drew near to the speaker who looked at him intently, then reached out gently and

touched him. Samuel almost immediately straightened that broken body of his and miraculously began to walk fully upright and with no visible limp at all. Tears fell quickly now from Leonard's burning eyes as he so wished that it could have somehow been him and not Stan. Yet strange as it sounds in some small way he somehow felt like it was. What was he feeling? It wasn't like he had never seen or heard this man before. Crowds seemed to always follow him wherever he went and he had followed too now for some time being so careful to stay in the shadows just out of sight.

Today though seemed so different to him, it wasn't as if this man was teaching any different, it was almost like he himself was somehow seeing and hearing differently. "How could that be?" he thought as he instinctively touched himself to make sure he was still the same old Leonard. This brought with it a chorus of laughter as the children, still focused on him and his strange clothing thought this a very funny thing to be doing. Leonard thought about rising to run away as he so often had when laughed at before in his life. But something strange happened instead. He actually felt a smile flow across his face and somehow sensed a strange warmth from deep inside. Now he really wondered what was going on, he sure didn't know, but he liked it. He even felt himself give a quick wink to the children along with a timid wave, as he turned his full attention back to the man who seemed at the center of all that was happening. What had the speaker just said if one were to weep, as he had so often in his own life, he would be comforted, as he somehow now seemed to be feeling? "This is ridiculous," he thought, "he isn't talking about me or to me." Yet somehow it felt so much like those words, those very words were in fact spoken just for him. He started to cry again as he had so many times in his sad life, but this time from a sense of joy that resonated deep within his very being.

He looked again at the crowd and at the man in the center. As he did the crowd seemed to slowly fade from view and all he saw was the man. Yet he somehow no longer appeared as a man, but something more, something so much more. He couldn't explain it right now, but deep inside he knew his life would never be the same again. The heat no longer burned him, yet it had not changed, the words seemed so much louder yet they had not changed, the crowd seemed all but gone yet it had not changed, the weight of shame and sorrow that forever burdened him seemed so much lighter, yet it had not changed, his heart, though, now beat so much stronger for it was fully changed. He sat there as in a daze listening for hours to this one he somehow dared no longer to call simply a man.

Here I sit alone and sad,
Thinking if I only had
The ability to be like others,
To play again with my sisters and brothers.

But my lot is cast my fate is set,
No longer am I, someone to be met.
They hide from me when I draw near,
Saying such things I dread to hear.

Get that freak away from us,
Wherever I go, I start such a fuss.
So here do I hide, just out of sight,
Today though, my desire I have to fight.

For even now these people hear,
A man, that I want to be near.

But to draw near to him would be so wrong,
They've made it clear I don't belong.

Even at this distance, I can hear,
His words, that carry true and clear.
They touch me like I was right there,
Like they're just for me, yet to share.

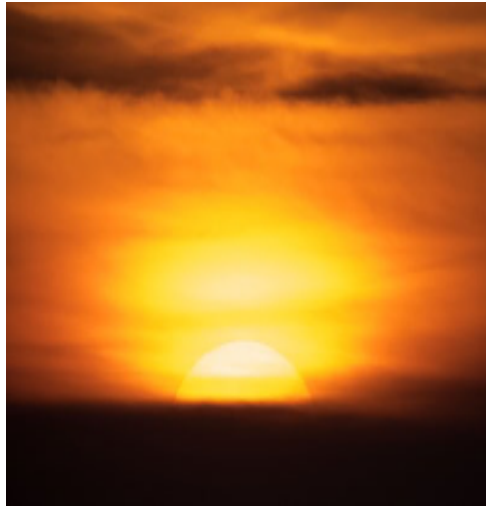
He speaks as if he has the right,
To make it day, when it's still night.
Like in my body where I feel dead,
He can make me feel alive instead.

I've heard him speak many times before,
But not like today, I must hear more.
Powers in each word that He has spoken,
It seems to mend all of me that's broken.

In my body mind and in my heart,
Trashed by this world and torn apart.
Today his words bring healing within,
To break the effects of my innermost sin.

This man is special this I can see,
His words they burn inside of me.
So what do you call one, who is more than a man?
And what about me, am I a follower or just a fan?

One who hears Him over and over again.
But is never different than he has ever been.
When He's broke my heart, brought my knees low,
It's then and only then this one I'll Know.



Chapter 10

So much more but what?

The glare from the noonday sun made Chase squint his eyes as he rode forward toward his destination. His assignment here in this foreign land had not been something he wanted at all. His superiors thought of it as a reward for his many impressive actions on the battlefield. He was far more comfortable on the battlefield subduing armed foes than here dealing with the day-to-day issues of an occupied people who hated him being there. At least in war, you knew clearly who your enemy was. Chase had already been dealing with his own internal battle and now had begun seeing things through a totally different light than he had ever known. He had recently been given a special assignment, which was actually the source of this new way of seeing. It had changed his whole view of not just military life, but life itself. This assignment was strange from the start for a strong often-feared leader such as Chase. He had always been taught to keep to himself and not become close to anyone because he may have to make a life and death choice for anyone under his command at any time, he could not have any emotional involvement with anyone. Respect, even if from fear of consequence, was imperative.

So why was he now beginning to question all he had ever known? Where was this strange view coming from? Actually, he did know, he knew all too well, and the funny thing is it was happening because of his new assignment. How upset would his superiors actually be if they had a clue their actions would lead to a softening of the heart of one of their best commanders his job being simply to keep an eye on a possible rebel leader in the region. Remember in an occupied land anyone can lead a rebellion at any time, some had actually grown to fear this leader, as the number of those who followed him had grown greater and greater.

This land had long been a hot spot for uprisings, and all who brought attention to themselves by things they said or did became a threat.

For this reason, Chase was told to stay close to this man listening to all he had to say and observing everything he did. Time and time again he heard this charismatic, dynamic, persuasive speaker mesmerize audiences gathered before him to the amazement of his followers and the rising concern of his skeptics. Chase found it at first nothing more than foolish words aimed at weak and simple-minded people who needed some form of hope in a hopeless time. But lately he too had begun to listen a little closer; something within him was stirred as he heard the words gently spoken. He often thought, "How can this man be a threat to anyone?" He tells everyone he meets that he is there to serve them and to show them a light they have long sought. Some seem to understand and others seem to question all he says. He often speaks of one who sent him and this makes some even madder at him. But his following still grows. He brings a sense of peace to a needy crowd. Chase has his own battle raging inside with which he so badly wants a peace.

People, of course, avoid Chase as he represents all they see as evil. Some look at him and then at this leader with a hope that he is here to rid them of the likes of Chase and his people. Chase had never heard a word spoken by this man that would make one think this though; he believed it was more the desire of the people than any goal of this man. He did, though, hear often of another kingdom, a different set of rules and standards for his followers different than those for others. This might have been enough to have him taken away if the wrong person heard it or believed it. What was probably the hardest thing for Chase to hear was the idea that love was the greatest power of all. Did he not rule by fear, evil, and complete control for almost all his life? Serving his leaders by taking all that stood before him either by killing them or having them submit to their rule. Yet hadn't he already, from somewhere deep inside, begun to question that way of life? This had caused such a battle to rage within him that some close to him began to question even his ability to command.

As he arrived near the crowd that day he had so many things running through his head, somehow he sensed this was where he had to be, where he was actually supposed to be. He got off his horse and stood at the edge of the large crowd that had gathered. They were, here again, to hear this man speak. As the first words reached Chase's ears he felt a strange but welcome sensation grow inside of him, a sort of burning. It almost caused him to fall to the ground, but with a quick grab he caught his saddle and held himself upright. Looking around to see if anyone saw him, he caught sight of another group separated from the larger crowd. They were gathered nearby under a large Sycamore tree. There were numerous women and children there since customs would not allow them to gather with the men being taught. Slightly separated from them but still under the tree was what appeared to a man wrapped in a hooded robe of some sort. This seemed quite strange as he should and could be with the other men and how odd that he would be wearing such a covering in this staggering heat. He made note to keep an eye on this man.

His attention soon was drawn back to the teacher and his piercing words. He spoke of odd things like forgiveness, helping the poor, and something about asking, seeking and knocking. All these things he had heard before yet they made no sense to Chase, but today they seemed different, today they seemed to make sense somehow. They were totally opposite of all he had been taught or practiced, was it just today or had they been impacting him for some time now? He had kept an eye on this man for some time now, a forced audience as it were. He realized his mind had wandered, pondering these words and their effect on him. Looking up Chase saw the crowd begin to part.

Suddenly there before him walked the man he had been assigned to watch. With eyes unlike any, he had ever seen the man looked over at him seeming to see into his very heart. Chase was frozen, how could this man have such an effect on him? He was a hardened soldier who had looked into the eyes of countless men as they breathed their last by his hands? Yet this man without a word, without a blow, without anything more

than a simple look, had caused something to break deep inside of him. If the crowd had not moved forward and caused Chase to look away he was sure he would have fallen to his knees before this man that very moment. He shook his head in wonder. What was happening to him? He heard some say as they passed how this man had spoken as one who actually had the authority. Chase knew a lot about authority yet he had never experienced what had taken place this day. He followed the crowd that descended the hill following in the footsteps of this leader. Something inside was driving Chase now, he needed to get closer to this teacher, this man, this what? He felt he was more, so much more, but what?

A life I live as others do,
I trudge along, there's nothing new.
I do all that is asked of me,
I have become what I was trained to be.

I don't think about it, I just obey,
I was trained to act just this way.
To rule over the weak, oppress the poor,
Fight and kill, till there are no more.

To take it all, claim it in their name,
For my leaders glory and fame.
Receiving what they've given me,
I wear my awards for all to see.

A perfect soldier in their eyes,
Never yielding to the mercy cries.
Conquering all the foreign land,
Victoriously treading on the blood-soaked sand.

So what is this that I now feel?
A questioning of what is real.
How can that be for one such as I?
Who never questions, or even ask why.

Can words alone so affect a man?
And make him wonder if he can?
Be the heartless man that he has been
Can he ever show any love again?

The words they seem to come in power,
They grow with beauty just like a flower.
Yet it's the man, from whom they flow,
That really causes this change to grow.

Power and control is all I've known,
Love and mercy having never shown.
But now I can't be who I was,
I'm different now just because.

I heard Him speak I heard Him say,
You can be different this very day.
Can it be that it's for real?
He says listen now here's the deal.

It's not that you win, it's that you lose,
It's giving up not trying to choose.
You have to see that I'm what you need,
I've proved it son for you I'll bleed.

No one has ever spoken like this,
I see it now what others did miss.
It's giving up, it's letting go,
I have it now; it's love I'll show.

I'm different now, and I am glad,
With this life, I've never had.
For my cold heart was truly broken,
By just the words that He had spoken.



Chapter 11

Paradise coming in to view...

Noon appeared to come sooner today, the sun even felt hotter and the emptiness inside seemed somehow deeper. As he drove in the long driveway of his ranch, Ron sensed something was wrong. Rounding the corner, he saw what it was. There ahead of him running back and forth in front of a group of crazy young mares was his two-year-old stallion. He snorted and pranced so pretty for all the mares to see. Ron shook his head in frustration and then, still dressed in his office clothes; he got out and made many futile tries to catch the young stallion. The worst thing that could have happen did. The young stallion, tired of being chased, headed for the back part of the pasture, where unknown to him the fence was much weaker. Ron knew he had to do something as this stallion would soon break through that weak fence and go after each of these mares.

Ron called Jane his wife. She worked against his wishes with several guys at a local barn. He knew they had nothing in their marriage anymore and this was her escape. He also knew like that weak fence in the back, she would break down one day and be in with the stallions, guys at the barn.

The barn was a mere fifteen minutes away, and Ron tried to express the urgency of the situation as he related it to her. Still it was forty-five minutes later when Jane rode in. She was sitting in the pickup next to her first choice of the men working with her at the barn. She saw nothing wrong with this situation and when questioned by Ron about it, she blew up. Jane had already pulled away from her family and yet whenever confronted somehow lived in total denial. They worked together to get the stallion caught and put away. Ron and Jane then parted ways without a word being spoken. There was coldness in that moment that would soon affect Ron's life like he could never have imagined.

Later that same night after they put the three boys to bed Jane told Ron " It's over; she had decided she was through and the marriage was over. The words seemed almost comforting as Ron sat back and pondered what had just said. Why did he not see this as just another abandonment in his life? Why was he not crushed and broken? God had prepared his heart. The crushing and the brokenness had long since had its disheartening effect. He had already told the Lord he could not go on this way and he had meant it. Not only had his marriage been a failure, but also his walk with God had become one too. He had pleaded with the Lord to save his marriage. But even more he knew he had to get his life right with God. He could remember saying, "Lord, strip me, break me, take away anything that keeps me from running hard after you Lord." He had sensed God taking him at his word.

So where in life do sorrows start?
How does despair grow in your heart?
You look just fine for all to see,
No trouble here it can't be.

Lives and marriages are such an act,
What you see isn't close to fact.
Under the surface heartache lives,
Lurking there a curse to give.

Our values based on what we see,
And what the world says we should be.
So few of us will ever know,
How do you let true love show?

Our shallowness is so widespread,
We act alive yet inside were dead.
There is just no value in all we do,
Of God's plans we have no clue.

We run and run but to no avail,
For upon us all, life will prevail.
Only when it's too late do we see,
What we could have been both you and me.

If we had not sought first place,
We could have won the real life's race.
The one that goes on even when we die,
It doesn't end here that is just a lie.

Eternity is meant for all,
But for most it's a fiery fall.
To the depths of hell, forever more,
Unless they answer that knocking door.

And then we must leave it all behind,
Things we pursued that made us blind.
The treasures we once held so dear,
And then trust in Him without a fear.

To follow without restraint,
That is the cost of a risen saint.
No value in the things of earth,
The past is dead if you have a new birth.

So seek Him now with all you are,
You'll find the Lord is never far.
He's waiting now, even today,
So give Him all, let Him have His way.

In your life and in your heart,
From you His Spirit will not depart.
Lord take away all earthy delight,
Let all that's darkness turn to light.



Chapter 12

Hope is coming just hold on

The bright noon sun beat down with a welcome warmth greeted Lucy, as she left the house that day. For a moment she felt a smile slowly come to her face. Replacing those persistent thoughts of her horrid past, the abuse, the rape, and the rage. She felt almost human, as she soaked in the sun's warmth. She looked up and squinted through her sunglasses as if searching for something in the sun's rays. How she knew she needed something, anything, to give this empty life of hers meaning.

She was married now and thought somehow that would help. Even though this man was not abusive like the other men in her life had been, he brought with him a new form of abuse, abandonment. Here in the midst of her marriage she had never been more alone. So added to her guilt, her shame, her anger and now came extreme loneliness. This day seemed different somehow, but how she didn't know, it was just a feeling.

She headed on over to the car and drove off to her doctor's appointment to see what might be the cause of her persistent lack of energy and nausea. After the normal long wait to actually see the doctor her answer was

quick in coming. The doctor entered the room looking at Lucy sitting there lost in her self-pity. He said, "Young lady cheer up, you have a reason to smile." He proceeded to tell her she was pregnant. Lucy looked up and almost started to cry. For instead of the happiness that she should have felt, fear gripped her already shattered heart. The doctor brushed it off as hormones and sent her on her way.

Fear continually followed her throughout her pregnancy. She had a husband, but for all practical purpose he might as well have not been there. Worst of all though was the constant thought that she would repeat her parent's behavior with this child. She already hated herself because of the way she had been treated. She could never live with herself if she ever brought the same pain she felt to a child of her own children.

The fateful day finally arrived and there she was looking down upon the newborn babe in her arms. Like the rays of sunshine, which gave her warmth those many months before, inner warmth welled up in her she had never felt before. That very moment a small flame of hope sprung forth within her. It had lived there all this time deep inside hidden by all the garbage of her life. Now as it began to burn, the fear she had fought all those months melted away. She somehow knew she could never show this baby anything but love. The cycle would be broken, it would end with her, and she was committed to making this child's life a blessing.

That commitment though would soon be tested. This baby's physical limitation became abundantly apparent for he was born with Cerebral Palsy. She learned very quickly that just as in the rest of her marriage, his problems were hers to deal with alone. Lucy never wavered though, and she truly was a blessing to this boy. In time she came to realize though that it was really him who was a blessing to her. She found in him a reason for living, a reason to go on. She finally had a purpose to her life, someone who really needed and wanted her just for her.

Lucy went on to have 3 more children and yes, more sad and broken marriages. Life still dealt her many rotten hands. But a change had taken place that moment she looked into an innocent baby's face. God had begun a work in Lucy's life. He was drawing her forward and upward. He was beginning to bring a light where only darkness had been before. He kept on whispering, "Hope is coming my little girl, change is coming my beautiful daughter, don't lose hope just hold on." And so she did.

Through sadness, shame, and sorrow
And no hope of a better tomorrow.
Darkness ruled here where despair had grown
This and only this was all she'd ever known.

She never thought or expected more
She'd been told this is what life has in store.
Don't even dream of gladness or bliss
Anything of value you are going to miss.

You have been treated like you deserve
And just accept this, you have not the nerve
To be other than you are and here's another fact
Just like your parents you too will act.

You'll hurt the ones who trust in you
Don't think you won't it's what you'll do.
Your heart cries out, no I just can't

I won't be like them no I shan't.

Then one day your test begins
Will you repeat their evil sins?
You carry a child there inside
And from your past you'll never hide.

But as you look upon his face
You feel his love as you embrace.
A change has come inside of you
Where has it been it seems brand new?

No it's been there waiting for a spark
To bring in light where it once was dark.
You gaze into those waiting eyes
You've been set free from all those lies.

He'll never feel the pain you've felt
You feel your rage and anger melt.
In it's place true love has grown
It's the kind of love you wish you'd known.

But that was then and this is now
The grip on you is broken somehow.
You'll bless this child and in his own way
God will use him to bless you everyday.



Chapter 13

To Risk it all.

Leonard could hardly sleep that night, what was he doing? How could one such as he ever think he had any rights? He knew he had to go though, no matter what these people thought. As he lay there in the early morning hours waiting for the sun to rise, his mind wandered to the night before. He remembered how he had pulled further into the shadows that grew long at evenings passing. From beneath the tree he had watched, as the crowd was moving past him. He dared not let himself be seen, he had thought of even sneaking away, for a brief moment. Then like earlier that day something had felt different, he somehow was not the same. His fear was less than ever before, something was stirring within him, and he could feel it. He felt such an urgency that was far more important than worrying about what those people thought. He had lived most of his life in fear of what people like that thought and felt when he was anywhere near.

Last night he had felt a change and it was still with him this morning. In the past, he would have gone back to the others like himself and faded away as if unseen and unnoticed by all the so-called normal people. Not today, not this time, he was going, following something, a pull more powerful than the fear that sought to keep him away.

He heard a sound from down the street. Gazing through the morning mist Leonard saw the crowd again begin to form. He rose and still at a distance, but not hidden, as usual, he followed them. As he came nearer and nearer his heart began to pound. Fear rose up in him and even though he felt he was moving he realized he wasn't. He stood there paralyzed with fear and doubt. "What are you doing?" his mind seemed to scream at him. He started to turn and run when he heard that voice. The one who had spoken on the mount the day before, the one who had changed the way he saw himself. Power seemed to flow in his words and Leonard's heart changed that second. This wasn't a man, this was, he struggled with his thoughts, this was, this was, he finally let himself say it, this was 'the Lord'. He heard himself whisper those words. He just stood there for the longest time thinking about what he had just said. Where had it come from he really didn't know, but now every second that passed he knew even more in his heart that it was true?

It was as if he was standing there alone, the crowd had long since faded from his conscience. He was so focused on the voice, the words, and the power that clearly drew him forward. He slowly moved forward

barely noticing the soldier still mounted on his horse at the edge of the crowd clearly taking in all that was happening. The pull kept growing stronger; every word he heard caused an assurance to grow in him. Suddenly he threw off his robes and laid his arms and face bare before this crowd. He no longer cared what they thought or if they were even there. He walked toward the sound of the Lord's voice. A murmur started slowly in the crowd and then a nervous roar. From somewhere to his left Leonard heard a yell of "Leper! Leper!" and to his right a cry of "Unclean! Unclean!" Then suddenly a man stepped in front of him at a safe distance and screamed in his face, "You have no right here, Leave!" Fear started to rise up in Leonard and his pace slowed, but just as suddenly he caught sight of something that drove that fear away.

The speaker had turned his way and through the crowd of angry people, his face was all Leonard could now see. His eyes seemed to draw him on with a renewed vigor and confidence he had never felt before. He walked forward totally ignoring the man falling all over himself to avoid any contact with Leonard. These people no longer had an effect or a power over him he was fully focused on the source of true power who stood before him. As the remaining crowd parted he found himself face to face with him. What was he to do? What was he to say? He somehow knew and that word rushed back into his mind as he fell helplessly to his knees. "Lord," he said, and buried his face in the soil before him. He felt no right to come in contact with this one before him, somehow sensing it had far less to do with his leprosy than the fact that he was in the presence of divinity. He knew in his heart he was kneeling before the Lord somehow sensing his Godliness. He fought hard to form the words he so wanted to speak. He didn't even lift his eyes to speak but said clearly for all to hear, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."

The crowd again murmured as these words were spoken. Some could be heard whispering, "Did you hear that? The leper called him Lord!" "Who does the fool think this man is?" they thought. Leonard just knelt there unwilling to raise his eyes and gaze upon the one before him, feeling more worthless than he ever had before in his life. He saw himself far beyond his leprosy now to the very core of his sinful nature somehow knowing this was the true source of his shame and guilt. How could he have risked it all today, how could he have somehow believed in his heart that he had a right to ask such a thing of God? His thoughts were broken, in fact, shattered, by the words that pierced the silence that had overtaken the crowd. "I am willing," he heard, and then these words "Be clean." He felt the touch that he knew was the Lord.

Suddenly a rush came over him as if a fire without pain. Warmth swept through him like none he had ever known. He somehow felt so different now. He raised his eyes and finally looked straight into the face of the one who had just transformed his life forever. The Lord looked at him and smiled. Leonard looked also at himself and saw his sores were gone. He had felt the cleansing from within and now saw its physical evidence. He knew he was clean, but what about the crowd, what about his country? The Lord said to him, "See that you don't tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." He knew what that meant, it was the only way he could be declared clean to the people even though he knew in his heart he was clean before the Lord. He had risked it all that day and was rewarded as few had ever been before.

With that thought in mind, Leonard obeyed the Lord and headed back through the crowd to do as He had said. What a difference that touch had made, those words that were spoken, that heart that had believed. For as he passed many now pressed close to him instead of pulling back. A few even reached out and touched him, Leonard instinctively pulled back. He looked around and smiled as he walked, this was so new to him. He passed again the soldier who looked down with pleading eyes as if searching for something in Leonard's eyes, and at last seeing it, a peace came over this man's face and his gaze moved away from Leonard toward

the Lord. As Leonard passed beyond the outer remains of the crowd three familiar faces greeted him. It was the children he had seen beneath the tree. They sensed in him the peace and rushed to him hugging him so hard. He just stood there, this former leper, this man once so unclean. He risked it all that day and this was his reward, he was now feeling the love he had only dreamed could be his again. Leonard knew that he must obey the Lord's commands concerning showing himself to the priest. Then he would return to his loving family and share with them how God had allowed the years of suffering and shame, yet now He had healed him and would make him, as promised, a blessing to many around him. He would also for years to come be an example of God promises being fulfilled in the midst of pain and suffering. You see because of what he risked and gained that day his story has been recorded in God's word for all to experience and somehow find hope and the courage to also risk it all.

Hearing Leonard's story seeing his trials like you have had or are having can you to have the courage to also say" If you're willing Lord, You can make me clean"? He can just ask. Matthew 8:1-4

As evening faded into night
And the entire crowd slipped out of sight
I felt a pull it did persist
No use I knew to try and resist

So followed I this crowd that was
To where I wondered just because
A crowd was never where I went
In solitude, my life was spent
But not this day, no not this time
For in my head there rang a chime
Like waking from a lifelong sleep
I'm driven now by feelings deep

There up ahead the crowd did form
To me as menacing as a storm
I wasn't welcome I wasn't wanted
All my life these people had taunted

They called me names they were so mean
But to them all I was Unclean
For Leprosy was mine to bare
Others stood far off to point and stare

So in the shadows, I was always found
Trying not to make a sound
To be left alone and then to die
This was my life and I wondered why

But not today for I would draw near
I'd throw off this robe I'd fight my fear
I had to see this one I'd heard before
I knew not what there was in store

Oh Lord I cried for all to hear
I've risked it all to just draw near
If you are willing Lord, I know you can
heal me, cleanse me make me a man

I throw myself on your mercy Lord
To cut forever this evil cord
That has bound me to my sinful past
And set me fully free at last

With but a touch of power and grace
My Leprosy's gone without a trace
Others marveled at what they'd seen
Once stained within I stood fully clean

This could be you for just like me
You have a sickness, only you can see
Its burden you bare tarring your life apart
It can be gone, let Him in your heart

So I beg of you this very day
See the truth and turn His way
Trust in the Lord for I hope you've seen
He can make you like the leper Clean



Chapter 14

Jason's fate

Fighting to open his eyes that morning seemed to take all the strength Jason could muster. What had happened to him? How could he, a strong vibrant young man, be so unable to move? What was this strange force that bound him tightly, like invisible ropes, leaving him paralyzed like this on his bed? The lack of strength and inability to even move hands or legs, this by itself was overwhelming. Yet it seemed to pale in

comparison to the dark shadow of fear that gripped his very heart. He had grown to hate the night as sleep came quickly behind the setting of the sun. Where he once was able to work well into the night, he found himself now a slave to this tiredness that fell on him like a blanket of despair. Though the daylight offered little relief from the fear, the depth of terror that came upon him during sleep almost drove him mad. Hopelessness had overtaken him in these last few weeks making even the desire to stay alive a fight he often thought he would lose. What was the source of this condition, what was the cure or was there one? What, if anything could be done to break this powerful hold on him? The only thing that drove him on or even gave him a reason to live was Chase, his master. He wanted so badly to get up and attend to his master needs. He once lived to meet his every need, which had given his life true meaning. Now even though he had been assured that everything was fine, his worthlessness tore at him. What a kind and understanding master he had, which was all the more reason he so wanted to get up and get back to his duties.

With great effort, he was finally able to open his clouded eyes. Only then could he make out the shape of someone kneeling before him. He strained hard to make out the face, but to no avail. His weak eyes failed him more each day now. Suddenly he heard his name "Jason, Jason, good morning it's me". He felt a smile wash over his own face ushered in by simply hearing Chase's voice. Here was the man he was to be waiting on now waiting on him. He suddenly felt tears come to his eyes and the smile leave just as quickly as it had come. As the very thought of this role reversal sunk in, he could not handle it. What an incredible act of kindness, compassion, and yes-even friendship Chase was showing him, a lowly servant. This was the very thing he had tried so hard to warn Chase against. This kindness was not acceptable for one in such a position as his. Being a Centurion demanded a certain air of toughness and yes even cruelty when needed. "Jason", he again heard his master's voice, "Are you alright?" "Where did that smile go my friend?" Chase continued. "You are going to be fine, he went on, I know the answer. God spoke to me last night and told me what I should do." Jason strained to speak and said "Which God master?" For Rome had many gods and Jason knew not which one there was that could help him. Chase had never given much attention to religion and had little faith in any of the so-called god's. He, of course, had been careful to never admit that, as these gods were very important to Roman rule. You followed their ways and worshiped their god's that is just what you did. No questions asked no disobedience accepted. Not if you wanted to get the benefits of Roman citizenship that is.

Chase again broke into his thoughts as he responded to his question, "the true God Jason, the true God". "Have you heard nothing of what I have been telling you lately? This man I have been assigned to keep an eye on, Jesus, he is different. When I hear him speak my legs grow weak as if I had endured a long fought battle and yet I want not to fight the feeling but run to it and embrace it. I have felt changes in me that weren't there since childhood." As these words were spoken Jason's eyes grew large and caught Chase's attention. "I know, I know Jason", Chase said. He went on to try and comfort Jason and told him he need not warn him or worry for him. In fact, he told Jason how just being around Jesus took away all worry and fear and that is how he knew what God meant when He had spoken to him. But Jason just stared with those big pleading eyes. Jason slipped into his thoughts no longer aware of Chase's presence.

Jason had for some time now been pleading with Chase to not be affected by this teacher's word, though daily he saw clearly a softening of Chase's heart and tenderness come out from within this hardened soldier. There were times Jason had to admit that he had even begun to wonder. Was there really something different about this Jesus? Even most of his own people, who practiced this superstitious religion that Rome laughed at, didn't believe him. With this thought, Jason had quickly dismissed any thought of believing these things himself. So why was his master willing to risk so much, for someone who seemed to mean so little to almost anyone. Chase was no fool, this is for sure, and he was certainly not a man to toy with. He'd gone time after time to keep an eye on this Jesus and in the beginning seemed unaffected.

Then one day he seemed different, changed somehow, not outwardly but inwardly. Jason could tell his

master was fighting a battle within himself, the old soldier and this new man that seemed so badly to want to come out. He tried to reason with Chase when he would relate his teachings to him, but Chase persisted trying to make him see how simple, pure and true Jesus words were. Jason remembered so often after these conversations, shaking his head and just walking away while glancing back with strange looks letting Chase know how totally confused he was by these new found beliefs and his seeming willingness to possibly believe them. Did Chase not understand that every decision he made affected the lives of everyone in his charge, including Jason himself? Most of them had nothing else, no one else, nowhere else, but here. If Chase's newfound belief or even its effect on him were discovered he would be demoted at the minimum and possibly put to death at the worst. Either way, Chase would no longer have a household of servants like Jason. This meant that they would be turned over to the local slave traders and sold for the highest price. He loved this man dearly, yet was so afraid of what was going to happen.

Little by little this very fear grew within him. He thought about it constantly. Who was watching what was being said about Chase behind those doors of the barracks? What about Clyde? He wanted nothing more than to find a way to do what he was unable on the field of battle to do, be better than Chase. This could be his chance to bring Chase down and Jason knew he was watching him and suspecting something. He began to worry night and day about what being a slave would be like and how he would ever live through such a change or if he would live at all. This fear and worry began to be all that his mind dealt with constantly. He had begun to mess up simple task that Chase would give him and this made him fear even more. Then slowly but surely he began to worry about the fear itself almost not thinking about what it was that he feared. As he did Jason began to find he was not feeling well more and more often. Then his fear of not being able to even do his job added to the other fears.

Chase reassured him of his lack of need to worry, but he still did. This just made things worse and worse. Now Jason seemed to fear anything and everything or even nothing at all. He seemed to grow weaker daily. In a short time, he could no longer walk without help. This too added to his fear. Now here he was, unable to move anything, but his mouth and eyes. He had grown to fear that these abilities would soon pass as well and he would just simply die. Jason fell back asleep thinking of how nothing, but nothing could ever free him from his dreadful fate.

Chase looked down compassionately at his friend and servant, knowing he had to go now. There was only one hope to save him from this death that awaited him. Chase left orders with his other servants to watch over Jason and make him as comfortable as possible until he was healed. They looked at each other and shook their heads totally convinced this man was going to die and that their master had lost his mind. They did, however, acknowledge their master and assured him his orders would be followed. With that Chase mounted his waiting horse and rode off toward Jason's cure.

What you knew you no longer know
Questioning you begin to show
That which was no longer is
And you ask yourself then what is this?

These changes though they're not in you
Affect you just the same, they do.
They threaten all that will ever be,
Now your future you cannot see.

Your life has never been your own,
To be a servant is all you've known,

But you always trusted what they said
Now you feel you'll end up dead.

You start to worry you start to fear
You won't listen you just won't hear
You think the worst will be your fate
The fear has made sleep a thing to hate.

Dreadful thoughts haunt your dreams
Steal your mind or so it seems,
Then health is stolen like a thief in the night
Your very strength, at last, takes flight.

You lie there paralyzed and then
You feel that fear rise up again.
You know you're lost without a hope
This fear, it binds you like a rope.

Invisible to human eyes
Unaffected by your constant cries,
Hopelessness is all you feel
Your very life this fear will steal.

Your master hears your desperate cry
He wipes the tear there from your eye,
He tells you fear not worry none
He knows the way he's found the one.

Who can heal your pain your life restore
And make your body still no more.
He'll set you free from that which binds
That clouds your thoughts and steals your mind.

He says he's gone to do for you
That which he himself can't do.
When he returns you'll rise again
So wait my friend, just wait till then.



Chapter 15

Compassion is shown, but at what cost?

Sleep, or the lack of it, seemed to be what Chase was experiencing that morning after following the crowd and the teacher down the hill. He quickly ate the meal set before him at the inn he had stayed at. A man of his position rarely paid when he traveled as many sought to gain his favor and possible future mercy by acts of self-serving kindness. A servant boy had even fed and saddled his horse, which was now waiting outside the door. He smiled and gave the lad a coin, this to the amazement of those nearby. This was not the normal habit of one such as Chase; he seemed less the soldier today and more a man whose heart beat warm within him. The coldness of his military life seemed to be less there today than usual. The fight between these two natures had raged for some time now. Today he sensed the battle turning, yet he had no idea how. He had decided though he had to speak with this one he had been following and observing per his orders. He wanted to for himself but even more for his servant and close friend.

His friend, Jason was paralyzed and bedridden. A fear had overtaken him that no military skill Chase possessed could drive away or destroy. It somehow held him fast and causing him anguish and despair. Chase somehow shared this even though he had been trained and warned so many times against it. He had become close to this man and he hurt deeply for him. Deep down inside he felt he was somehow the cause of Jason's sickness must also somehow be part of the cure. One minute so sure the next moment doubting everything, what was going on inside of him? He had come all this way to ask of this one, this speaker, this teacher, this man, this what? What had he thought for a second, what had he almost said? He could be killed for such a thought; he would have killed others for such a thought. He was trained and raised to serve Rome and only Rome bowing before its ruler, making others do the same. How could he then dare to think of this simple man with thoughts of authority and honor reserved only for royalty? Something bigger than himself, than his servant's sickness, even than this crowd was at work here he could feel it. He thought back to what he had told Jason, that God told him to be here and to speak to this man this prophet, this...

His mind was drawn back again to the sound coming from down the street. The crowd that had existed the day before was now forming again as the man or the person, the..... well, whoever he was, he was back again at the center of this group. Chase mounted his horse and rode slowly down the street, taking up a position at the eastern edge of the crowd positioning the early morning sun at his back for a better view. Being trained to be observant of all that took place around him little went unnoticed by Chase. He saw the

three children run laughingly at the outer limits of the crowd. He also saw some men who clearly were here only for what they could get materially not spiritually. They moved about trying to sell their wares to those in the midst of the crowd, which seemed far more interested in the man now beginning to speak.

Also not unnoticed was that strange man who Chase had seen beneath the tree the day before. He watched him closely as he slowly and cautiously inched closer and closer to the crowd. The man seemed to barely take notice of Chase somehow completely focused as if being drawn by an unseen hand. Then all of a sudden the man threw off his robe and revealed his sore-covered body. It was clearly the repulsive signs of leprosy. The mood changed at once Chase was prepared to move forward and calm the crowd if necessary. The last thing he needed was a riot on his hand. He had his own business to take care of so he just held fast for a moment. To his surprise, the crowd began to part as he heard what sounded like a threatening wind through a thick forest sweeping before this leper. With that, the leper moved forward toward the one at the center of this crowd. He watched as this man, this leper slowly approached the one called Jesus. With pure compassion in his eyes, he drew him forward, until at last, the leper stood the required distance from him. He dared not go closer. Chase could almost sense the wordless communication between the two as suddenly the leper fell to the ground before him.

Then he heard that word he had dared not speak himself, but which had hid behind his lips. "Lord" rang through the crowd as if meant for his ears alone. All else seemed now to fade, as Chase was alone in his thoughts and raging internal battle. It had all led up to this very moment he knew it and it had to be now or never. Could he just ride away and forget what had been said? Forget that he had heard the word first inside his own head? Could he go on fighting what he knew to be the truth? What about Jason, what about his word, what about the words he was sure had been spoken to him by God himself? His escape into his thoughts was broken as the leper was coming back his way. But wait the crowd wasn't moving back this time, no, in fact, they were pressing in, they were touching him and now he stood there before him. How could this be, no more sores, no more sorrow in those eyes, no more pain upon the face? This man stood before Chase clearly changed, visibly healed. He looked into his eyes as if his answer was there then realized it wasn't it was in the same place as the leper had found his.

Warmth washed over Chase now he knew what he must do. He knew now why God had told him in a dream to come here for Jason's sake. His gaze moved from the man before him to the one who stood a short distance away with a look that now drew him forward as it had the leper. As the crowd's attention seemed to follow the former leper, Chase dismounted and walked toward the crowd. It parted for him as it had for the leper moments before. Still out of fear, but a different kind. The leper for what they might catch and Chase for what they might suffer. He soon found himself face to face with this man called Jesus. A smaller crowd in the very center watched his every move.

What was this Centurion going to do with their master? What was his business here? Without thought or hesitation Chase fell to his knees and let the word he had been struggling with burst forth, "Lord," he said. A smiled burst forth upon his face, for he suddenly felt all the fear and reservation that had fed the burning fire of doubt within him disappear. Then again so all could hear he said, "Lord,"

After many minutes of bowed silence, Chase slowly raised his head and looked into the eyes of the one he had called Lord. He struggled trying to speak for he had never in his life before felt so unworthy. This, from a man known for intimidating others with his power and his presence, he was now in such awe of the one who stood before him he dared not speak. Jesus gently touched him and a peace flowed through him like nothing he had ever known.

He now experienced for himself that wordless communication he had sensed when watching the leper before. It was as if the Lord spoke into his heart words of encouragement and acceptance. Chase began to

relate how he was there for his servant Jason, who he could no longer bear to see suffer. How he believed, with all his heart, that Jesus could heal him and set him free from that which held him paralyzed and the fear that tormented him night and day. The Lord looked longingly into Chase's eyes and said, "I will go with you." With a heavy sigh Chase humbly said, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof." Knowing his position and even more sensing the true royalty of who he was kneeling before, he explained how he too was a person of authority, yet sensing Jesus total authority, he told him how his orders were followed simply by people hearing them. So he said, "Lord if you but speak it, it will be done I know it will." The Lord was very pleased and somewhat taken back as he told those near him; faith like this is unseen, even among those who should see it easiest. Jesus turned to the Chase the centurion and said, "Go! It will be done just as you believed it would."

Chase found out later that at that very moment Jason had in fact been healed. He walked back through the crowd, who somehow now sensed there was nothing to fear from this man. He like the leper walked through the crowd to Jesus one man and returned a new man.

Chase mounted his horse and left that day clearly changed, initially from his own act of compassion for his servant, but eventually from his total acknowledgment of Jesus as Lord. Chase was right in believing that these events were about something far more important than him or Jason or the crowd that watched that day. In the end, Chase's story is ours because it is recorded in God's Holy Word.

It is there for us to draw strength from, to know we can risk it all for the true master. We can intercede for others and have them healed by but a word from Jesus. We will never know what it cost this centurion to call Jesus Lord that day. But I believe with all my heart that Chase would act the same way again even if he knew ahead of time it might cost everything. He, in his own way, sacrificed for a friend that day, maybe with his life, we will never know. For as a soldier he so clearly knew the battle within him was over and a prize had been won, that no cost was too great to attain. His life was now his and none could take it from him. He had come face to face with God and walked away totally changed and his servant had been set free.

The battle rages here inside,
Where do I run where do I hide.
One side of me says it is right,
The other doesn't seem to even fight.

It's just there as if to say,
Go ahead you fool look away.
I know its right but I can't see,
How I can change and not be me.

The me that I've been taught is real,
But have lately doubted what's the deal.
Can change take place can it really be,
Is he truly able, is he what I see.

I've heard of him and I know his name,
Will I really never be the same?
I've lived and died but by the sword,
Now how can I just call him Lord?

That could cost me my very life,
My job, my children, even my wife.
This world doesn't just let you go,
They make it clear so you will know.

They must be wrong if you are right,
And for this reason you, they fight.
To stop this power that's grown in you,
Persecute and kill you they will do.

Whatever comes I somehow know,
His love is all I want to show.
And there is no cost that is too great,
This is my life this is my fate.

I've called Him Lord for such He is,
And I am here to tell you this.
He'll set you free from what holds you fast,
And give you peace that will forever last.



Chapter 16

Set free at last

Sounds of celebration could be heard clearly even though the distance was still great from Chase's house. He had pushed hard to return home quickly and see what he believed with all his heart to be true. His ears now led him to believe even more that all was as he hoped it would be. Drawing closer he could see people pointing and calling his name while dancing and leaping into the air with joy. Suddenly a horse appeared from the midst of the crowd and with its rider waving madly he rushed toward him.

He knew at once it was the answer to his prayers, the desire of his heart, the purpose of his trip, the proof of his belief, and the handiwork of his Lord. Yes, there astride that onrushing horse was Jason his beloved servant. As he approached Chase could hear him scream, "Master, I am healed, I am healed, I've been set

free". Just as the two horses met both riders jumped from their mounts almost falling as they ran toward each other. They laughed and cried and held each other for the longest time.

Chase slowly pulled back and said, "Let me look at you, my friend". Tears of joy ran down Jason's cheeks as he said, "master you were right weren't you?" "Your Jesus did this didn't he?" Chase said, "Yes my friend He did" As they both remounted their horses, Jason began to relate the events of the preceding days. They moved slowly wanting to share this special moment without the interference of the crowd that now stood waiting in the distance.

Jason's eyes filled with tears many times while sharing the unbelievable events with Chase. Chase pointed out that it was Thursday and he had ridden through the night to save a day. He clarified that he had in fact left on Tuesday morning arriving near Capernaum at night staying at the local inn. Then leaving shortly after his special encounter with Jesus around 10:00 Wednesday morning. Jason's eyes seemed to sparkle when he heard Chase speak. Knowing now for certain from what his master had just said the reality and magnitude of his experience.

Now Jason spoke. "Tuesday seemed to drag on forever", Jason related. The fear and anguish seemed to grow somehow stronger throughout the day. At suppertime when the servants tried to feed him, Jason said something seemed to grab his throat and hold the food fast as if trying to choke him. He could almost feel a hand wrap around his neck and squeeze. He said he was sure he would have choked to death if he hadn't fallen from the bed to the floor, causing the food to become dislodged.

No one is sure how he fell though. He couldn't move due to the paralysis. Those present said it was as if an unseen hand, had saved him from seemingly sure death. This brought more fear into the house. The servants spoke among themselves of all the strange happenings and even their master's strange words before departing.

Now Jason's eyes grew cold as he shared how the night seemed it would never end. His dreams had been haunted before, but nothing like this. Evil seemed to be everywhere as if desperate to accomplish its task. He kept feeling as if a battle was literally raging above him and at times within him. At one point he felt steel cold hands grip his heart and seek to pull it down through his body. Many other cold hands pulling down on the rest of him joined these.

As he laid there certain his life was over and almost giving in to the evil hissing in his ears. The silent screams of "yes pull him down quickly take him now he is ours" rang in his ears. At the last second a light shown all around him blazing brighter than the noonday sun. Even with his eyes closed and his life all but gone, he still sensed the presence there with him of ultimate power and glory.

He recalled Chase telling him of God, the one true God. Somehow knew this was Him. As he heard the last shrill scream from within his mind crying out "No" the cold hands released their steely grip causing his body to seem to float. The life once all but gone flowed back into him and a tiny spark of hope began to burn deep inside his heart.

Then just as quickly as it appeared the light and the feeling were gone. He related how he was left there alone with his thoughts to ponder if he was going crazy. Did any of this really happen or was it just another dream. He tried to move and still he lay helplessly bound by the bonds he began to realize he had created himself. Beginning to understand that his fear and worry had created this fate. It was far worse than what he had even thought it might be, he saw how helpless he was to reverse its effect now. What people saw on the outside was physical paralysis, but an even greater paralysis existed on the inside. He now lay unable to shake free of the bonds of either.

Finally, Jason said morning came. It seemed a sun without warmth shown through the window that Wednesday. Sorrow gripped him hard and despair seemed his only companion. Even though down inside there was still that small flicker of hope, it was like an unseen candle in a cold dark night, you know it's there but you can't find it or see it. The servants came with food, but fear gripped him at once and he drank something quickly before his throat again was choked as before.

Morning drug on as a new battle waged from a final desperation took place. Then an onslaught of fear overwhelmed him, with it came coldness, an almost irresistible desire to just let go and die. "Stop breathing" I heard myself say, Jason related.

Somehow just in time, the sun broke through and its warmth radiated through the room. Seeming as if the room were filled with the sun itself. That little flame inside began to grow. I felt the warmth within as well as without. I could my legs again, I felt my back, I felt my hands I felt my fingers. I felt it all; my whole body had feeling again. As I lay there, master I could feel the strength of my youth come back into my body and then suddenly I realized all my fear was gone.

I cared not what befell me, for I was not going to worry or fear what was ahead. I knew for certain that all you had been telling me was true and that you had asked the one true God for my healing. Then I knew for certain it had been granted. Master, at that moment I said, "Lord I know you not, but my master does and I want to know you too" Something happened in my heart that moment, I can't exactly describe. It was like a hole was filled with something that was never there before. I wasn't me anymore Chase does that make sense?" he asked. Chase said "Yes Jason it makes perfect sense" he smiled " I'm not me anymore either" Jason went on to share how he decided to try to move and he could.

He sat at first then rose to his feet. At once a hunger came over him from lack of many meals and he found himself heading for the kitchen. As he walked in the doors, Sylvia the new servant girl looked up immediately fainting, knocking many pans to the floor. The sound brought all the remaining servants to the kitchen. Funny at first some were so concerned with Sylvia, they didn't even take notice of Jason.

Suddenly everyone was around, touching him to make sure it was actually him. Still most of them were totally confused at what had happened and kept changing the story. Each tried to tell others around the small community. Chase looked at Jason and asked, "My friend what time of day did this happen, as if I didn't know?" "Well" Jason said "It was right at the 10 o'clock hour in the morning" Chase said" Just when **our Lord** said it would be so".

They both smiled riding silently through the crowd of revelers who seemed total content to celebrate the healing, celebrate their masters return, yet somehow like so many even today they missed the miracle of the moment and the power in their midst.

Will you miss the message and the power of this story taken from the pages of scripture? A book that says in Heb; 4:12 that it is "living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to the dividing or soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

Search your heart today? Look into the mirror of God's word and see yourself for who you really are, allowing Him to change and heal you today? Don't be like the crowd, enjoying the moment, but not seeing you in the story. James says in 1:23b-24 "a man looks at his face and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like." Please don't let that be you today. Jesus, still today can, but speak a word and make it so in your life. Be who you were created to be, walk in it starting today.

There is prayer for you so they have said
So why is it you feel as if you're dead?
With hands so cold they freeze your heart
You fear your spirit and soul will part.

A battle rages for your soul
You're powerless it takes its toll
When all is lost or so it seems
A radiance falls like warm sunbeams.

The room is filled the cold has left
You're safe as if hidden in the cleft.
Now as you lay and ponder long
You start to wonder but the feelings strong.

You're sure you felt it but still here you lie
Helpless to break free condemned to die.
The prayers now spoken the word now shared
By him who loves you, him who cared.

Nothing you said, nothing you cried
Has brought about this change inside.
It wasn't you, you're sure of this
So what's the source, what did you miss?

Could it actually be my healing is real?
Are these my legs and hands I feel?
It was the prayer it was the love
It was God's hand reaching from above.

I see it now; I know it's true
Prayer can make one's life brand new.
When it's His will you wish to see
Then God's true power will set you free.



Chapter 17

Is Paradise real?

Ron, watched as the storm clouds rumbled off into the distance. He had seen their approach, felt the power of the thunder, lightning, and heavy rain. Now as he watched them roll away he thought. This storm has brought destruction and yet during it the rain also washed away what was dead and brought forth growth. The rainbow that followed showed how much beauty could come out of the darkest moments as the sun burst forth, he realized it was always there, even when he couldn't see it.

Ron used this lesson from that storm. The sunshine, being the joy and happy spirit can at time be hidden by the troubles of this world. The truth is, though you can't always see it, you need to remember it is always there. The sun and its warmth are a constant the storm or trials of life are what is temporary. This knowledge caused Ron to recognize what still lived inside of him. In fact Ron allowed it to come out increasingly. This quality in him drew people naturally. Many grew close to him for comfort and encouragement. "What irony," he often said, "These people seek from me what I myself have for so long forgotten, how can this be?"

When the storms had hidden this joy and love, Ron sought many ways of trying to bring this spirit out. Living a lie of being who he so wanted to be, but just wasn't led to many problems, the pretender. Followed by shallow relationships with meaningless physical interaction and faked love. Drug use, that put him in another state and gave a temporary veil to the ever present pain, but letting him come back even worse than before.

He felt with all his heart there had to be an answer. That love he once had, now unknown to him, kept driving him forward. So, he sought for answers in the world's religions. Each starting strong, with their own set of truths. They burned like a bonfire, but then burned out for lack of substance. Some claimed a power outside of you, while others said it was inside. Others just said to be at peace with all around you and be a part of everything. He gave each a chance and so wanted them to be the answer, but they were only good peoples ideas. He avoided Christianity though, due to false teaching of the public schools that had put only this religion in a bad light.

Yes he walked in all these things for a while, but it wasn't there. Mind control and transcendental meditation, but again the same empty result. Even studied UFO and past civilizations for clues. This led him to a bible study as some had claimed Jesus was not from this earth.

Ron joined a group of on fire Christians. From nothing more than curiosity about the above point. After many meetings, he questioned all he once thought true. Remembering what all the other religions, practices and teaching claimed to be and to answer, he realized that this was what they all were missing. The Love, the Power, and the Presence that so overwhelmed one when you understood it. These others had pieces, some truth, but only in part. Yes the power was within us, and outside us. Yes we needed to be at peace and show universal love, yet in our own strength we can't. So a little of all they claimed was true, even that Jesus was not from this earth. Though they all missed the cornerstone, the building block on which all love, power, truth and yes life draws its existence

One day Ron broke. He fell to his knees and for the first time admitted his hopeless condition and the need of a savior. He needed someone to step in where he couldn't himself and make that change real. That's all God needed to hear, and the chains fell off and love rushed in. He had moved his faith from his head, down to his heart.

He lived happily ever after the end. Wait no that's just not how it works. Yes you change, but the world around you doesn't. Maybe you have a new life now, but as an infant there is so much growth left to make. And many trials and problems, but now you see them differently. Often you are just coming into a storm, in a storm, or just coming out of one. Fast forward to his life where we left him.

Ron once had a marriage, a family, a business, a ranch with forty show horses, and even the popularity he so desired. He allowed them to take first place in his life. They had it all and yet had emptiness within their hearts that made all these things worth nothing. In the past he would have dwelt on the situation at hand and slipped into a depressed state. All things were happening for a reason and this time he would not get in God's way.

Broken and stripped, he still could be used by God? Yes he had fallen flat on his face. This failure resulted from not following hard after God. Everything within him right now wanted him cried you're unworthy, undeserving, unable. Ron, face it, like a leper, you are so unclean. You don't even deserve to come into His presence. God reminded Ron that he never deserved to come into His presence.

Ron returned to taking God at his word. God hates divorce, but allows people to make their choices and live with the consequences. All he had built on his own collapsed. Oh what a great collapse it was, leaving a cloud of dust, rubble, pain and sorrow in its wake. Yet when all the dust had settle and all the junk had burned away, it wasn't ashes and despair that were left behind. No, it was a life more golden than he could have ever imagined. The Lord had drawn so close.

Ron grew stronger and stronger in this renewed walk with God. He was sure he heard Him whisper in his ears, "More change is coming my son, more change is very near, keep walking toward the light no consequences fear." And so he did.

Your soul, your spirit what makes you, you.
It came at birth when all was new
It grew and made all things alive
Now crushed and broken, fighting to survive

Pain and hurt replaced love and joy
Trust is lost for this little boy
His world once happy and full of life
Now's filled with sorrow and daily strife

He tries each day to please all he see's
Yet he himself he can never please
What he seeks seem to have died inside
His feelings he's forced to hide

Others see his smiling face
His openness and warm embrace
But underneath dwells a heart that cries
And when alone it dies

His mind tells him there is way
He reads and searches every day
He's found one and his hearts just burns
But wait it fails and his spirit still urns

Then he looks where the world said no
They don't look there just don't go
It's just fairy tales a storybook
Then it tells you here just look

But he already looked there
It left him feeling empty and bare
He will try this other way
Where he is sure he won't stay

It started slowly, not like some burning flame
It's not a book of fear and shame
Instead it flows with amazing love
And showers down gifts from above

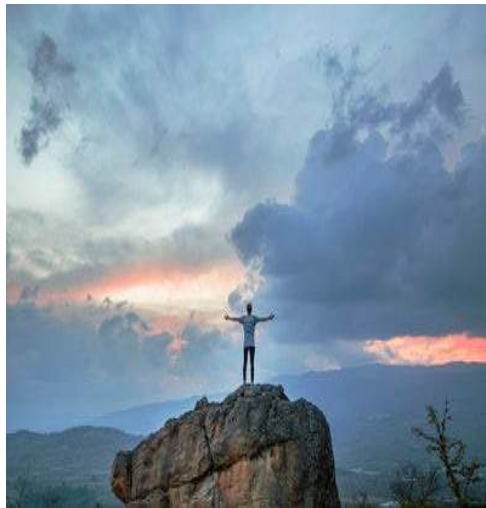
But he thinks about what he has learned
And yes it seems for what he's yearned
So with his mind he acts
He plays the part he's good in fact

Trying his hardest he can't break the chain
Release his heart and undo the pain
To his knees he falls in sorrow
Will his past be his tomorrow?

But no, he is saying he can't do
These things needed to make a person new.
Was this all God needed to open up that door?
Could this be what he's been searching for?

That spirits back, and the joy is too
It shines each day even when he's blue
Life isn't perfect but the suns now shining
The storms still come but he's not whining

Yes he does suffer still
There is pain, and he does get ill
And the world he is living in
Is affected by his and others sin



Chapter 18

True Paradise found

Ron grew restless as the morning hours brought an end to his restful sleep. There he lay alone with his thoughts. He pondered the events of the last few days or more like the last few weeks. "Okay," he thought, "It was in fact the last few years. What a roller coaster ride!" he thought. Yet he would change nothing about it as he had so grown to see God's hand in everything. Even when all looked bad he remembered God's words "All things work out for good for those who Love the Lord". If it isn't good he thought then it hasn't worked out yet.

He smiled as the thought eased through his mind. His life sure was not the same. First his struggling marriage ended, then his life, followed by his business failing, and now even his job ended. Yet God kept pulling and life kept changing. He remembered hearing once "you will never know that God is all you need, until He is all you have". Well even the few possessions that Ron had left seemed nothing compared to knowing God. He had grown so close to his boys during that time. The world screamed you're broken, you're crushed, you're nothing, yet he felt richer that day than ever before in his life.

Then God added to his blessing by allowing him to meet Lucy, an awesome Christian woman. She was devastated by life itself and beaten down beyond what most people could have born. She was his Ruth he was her Boaz. God seemed to use her daily to draw more out of Ron. She nurtured in him the need to be a Godly man and to keep his focus on the Lord. To this day their friendship is a great source of strength for each of them.

Ron's mind returned to where he was right now. He had a large debt that loomed over him, no job, a dwindling savings account and no clue of where to go or what to do. He had come to a point in his life where all had been stripped away. His flesh so wanted to fix all this. "Use your mind," he thought, "Get a job, start another business, do whatever it takes save your family, save yourself," his mind screamed. His heart seemed to sit by watching to see what God would do. Ron fought this battle that raged within him. His mind saw what was and felt crushed, yet his heart sensed a peace and knew there was far more here than the mind could ever see. Which would Ron listen to that day?

He lay upon his bed and told God how he felt and what his mind's eyes saw. He also shared with God how his heart felt peaceful now. The eyes of his heart and his mind's eye saw as one. All that was happening made perfect sense. Had he not asked for this? God now honored it? He had a choice to make. God had brought him here he had asked Him to. Now Ron must decide if he would trust in the Lord with his whole heart and not look back. Could he face this world of giant obstacles? Armed with only a sling and a stone and the living God. Would he again trust in himself and his own abilities to conquer life's challenges?

As he lay there Ron, already knew the answer, but the battle raged on. His mind kept thinking, "Are you serious?" A martyred missionary James Elliott said "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." What he couldn't keep was already gone. Eternal life was what he could gain and not lose. This for giving up what the world screamed was important. No choices at all more like common sense.

Ron thought of the Leper (Leonard) who had risked it all to gain that which was of eternal value. What a great faith in his Lord. This temporary paralysis that had held him fast these past few days passed from him. Now he knew how the servant had felt and why (Chase) the Centurion had gone before the Lord. God was using these examples of true faith to restore this broken man. With each breath Ron drew in, the spirit within him grew stronger. He knew his life was over it was no longer his. The Lord owned him now. Yes, he would still walk through the mountains and the valleys of life, but not like before. Ron could see more than ever the hope set before him. Now called to encourage and build up others to take back and restore what the enemy had destroyed. This was to reveal to them what had been revealed to him. Even though he knew he would waver again. Ron also understood he had no choice but to fall at the feet of Jesus that day. Call Him Lord and offer him a living sacrifice. God had drawn him close and Ron knew he could say he Knew Him.

When does it stop? When can I rest?
Seems I reach the top thinking I've passed the test.
I come over the peak with a sigh of relief,
But no there's another mountain I sense such grief.

I ask myself, Oh why do I even try?
Should I keep climbing these mountains but why?
Seems all I do is climb and survive,
Is this all there is, it is for this I'm alive?

To ever escape the valley of despair,
A force pulls me, yet I seem unaware.
I climb; yes I climb toward the peak of relief,
But then again, always to my disbelief,

Drawn once again to the valley below,
Why must I keep coming here? Why don't I know?
There is nothing here for me, nothing here for which I long,
Yet I'm pulled back down like a magnet so strong.

But the peaks seem to be my heart strong desire,
When I dwell in the valley, inside there's a fire.
So I climb and the fire eases,
As I reach the top it ceases.

But what do I see before my eyes,
Not the beauty of the clouds or the baby blue sky.
No I see another valley lying there below,
I have climbed the mountain and found no plateau.

Oh how can this be was I not redeemed?
Did not the Lord call me His esteemed?
What did I miss, what did I hear wrong,
Lord I can't keep climbing; I'm not that strong.

God speaks to my heart and says child come near,
Of what do you ponder of what do your fear?
Stand with me here for a moment if only you will,
Let your mouth not speak and let your mind be still.

When I found you in the crater of hopelessness,
Did you not climb its slopes forever in your selfishness?
Did you not climb for pleasure and yet in vain?
You ran after this world while it drove you insane.

Now look back with me at your journey and find,
Where you struggled so as you wandered blind.
No fire burned when in the crater you stayed,
So from its grip you never had strayed

But then I showed you the glories to come,
You said Lord; I see you're the One.
You said I'd follow you where you lead,
You knew I had died for you, you knew I did bleed.

So I showed you the way so you could follow,
Yet now your words seem empty and hollow?
You question my leading but how can this be,
Have you lost faith believing no longer in me?

Look at the mountains and valleys of your life,
You dwell on your struggles and hold on to your strife.
Growing older but getting nowhere,
You don't see the value or seem not to care.

Look again with your heart not your eyes,
See of such value that inside of you lies.

You hurt, you've suffered and crushed inside,
Friends turned away, and the world has lied.

Rejoice for they treat you like they once treated me,
As you look once more what do you see?
Your hearts transformed your life it shows,
For this is where I led you and now it's me you know.



Chapter 19

Hope in the midst of sorrow

Lucy woke that day as if she hadn't really slept at all. She found herself pouring over the questions and her answers to them she had worked on the day before. Fear gripped her heart and made it hard to breathe. She just knew she would blow it as she always had in the past. She would be called upon in few short hours to take the stand and speak words that would help decide her daughter's fate.

Larry, her ex husband, had decided he would hurt her and attack her where he knew it would do the most damage. He would take her loving daughter away. Lucy just knew she would blow it and then forever feel she had let her daughter down. She had always been told she was useless and stupid. Any time she had spoken before she had been made to feel worthless. This had caused her to be paralyzed, frozen, as if actually unable to speak. Then she would fight to push through, but her mind would go blank. No words would be there to speak forth even if she could.

Would it really be different this time? Ron, her close friend, encouraged her God was in control. She

somehow believed him as she believed God had sent him for her and her family.

Ron had helped to bring healing to her shattered heart. She had never felt good about herself, or that she could actually be of value. Somehow she did now.

"But this is you, Lucy," her mind told her, "you will blow it, you will freeze like you always do." She fought that battle all morning, even as she showered and then began to pray. She had prayed so many times about this day, asking God if her precious Jolynn was coming home? Could Larry somehow manipulate things and take her away? She so wanted to hear the word 'No' ring in her ear, but what she heard was, "Just trust me." A sense of fear mixed with peace would wash over her as she heard those words.

Ron and Lucy prayed together. She so wanted to hear him say everything would be set right and their worries would soon be over. Ron had learned years before not to tell God what to do in his prayers. In fact he had said he was to intercede for God in prayer, not ask God to intercede for him. Meaning he needed to pray God's will not his own desires. This morning she heard him say, "It is not about you or your daughter that this trial takes place today, but about eternity. How you react and act and what transpires here today is far bigger than just this moment." She was slightly taken back by this prayer, but it gently rested there inside her heart.

She avoided eye contact with Larry as her daughter rushed to her. They had just come off the elevator in the courthouse. She held her close cherishing this moment. She had never been away more than two weeks before in her life, but for the past 7 weeks her only contact had been by phone. Now it seemed so hard in the midst of this pending trial to even let much emotion show. Why had this happened how could this be taking place? She barely had time to think these thoughts before the elevator doors open again and her attorney stepped out. Lucy, Ron and her attorney moved to a nearby room to discuss the upcoming trial. Lucy still felt the fear gripping her and wondered how she could go in that courtroom and be of any value. Her attorney told her how she would do fine, trying to reassure her. Ron smiled again as if to say, "God has your back. He is there waiting even now." With that they walked slowly toward the courtroom.

The doors opened and they started to enter. Lucy whispered, "God I can't do this, you will have to," As she spoke those words, something amazing happened. It was as if a warm blanket wrapped around Lucy that very moment, like being tightly held in a strong set of loving arms. She sensed a peace she had never felt before, even as Larry and other witnesses took the stand and spoke forth lies meant to sway the judge, this peace never left. Now it was her turn to take the stand. There before her was Larry's attorney, with an evil glare meant to intimidate her she knew. He began to question her trying to make her mess up. Words just flowed from her with unnatural ease and a peace rested on her as the minutes became hours. She knew for sure that whatever happened that day, whatever was the outcome, and God was in control. When all the lies were spoken and the truth was almost fully ignored, the judge told them, "Give me a bit, I'll let you all know what I decide."

Lucy already knew what he had decided as it was clear throughout the day. He had already made up his mind before they ever walked into court that day. She was right too, for when he returned, the judge announced that Jolynn would go home with Larry and what seemed unthinkable was now reality. So why was Lucy not crushed? Why was that peace still there? She knew the answer before the question formed in her mind. She had sensed God's presence. She had never felt that before. He had been with her from the moment she had entered that room. He knew she still needed Him. God had met her in the fullness of her fear and brought peace in the midst of the unthinkable.

The trip home wasn't easy. Even as she related to all her friends and relatives the events of the day, Lucy used some of Ron's words from that morning. She told them how what had happened was for a bigger purpose than this trial. She surprised herself as she witnessed with her attitude. The next day she came down

some and the pain began to take hold. She felt herself start to fall back into the mode of her past again. But then she turned to her friend Ron to pray with her and help get her focus back. God was using the two of them to minister to each other. He was clearly preparing them for something far bigger in their lives, than this recent trial. Lucy had learned such an important lesson through this. She had always felt so unclean, so dirty from within. This because of her past, which left her, paralyzed with fear and tormented by her feeling of worthlessness.

Just as God has used (Chase) the Centurion to intercede for his servant, God had used Ron and His own presence to bring her to what she needed that day. Like (Leonard) the Leper and (Chase) the Centurion, she saw God for who He was and so was able to finally see herself, for whose she truly was. She had been set free, no longer unclean like a Leper, but washed white as snow before the Lord. No longer paralyzed with fear, but set free to walk forward as a vessel God could finally use. She had grown so much, yet she knew the healing was far from over. God had more in store, so much more. Her trust was rewarded as Larry soon lost custody. She and her daughter were reunited.

God is still working in Lucy today changing, transforming, and make His little girl all she was meant to be a beautiful woman of God. No matter your circumstance, He can do the same for you.

Fear was all she ever knew,
It was all she'd ever felt.
Why was her pain forever new?
Why did her heart so melt?

Life was never what she wanted
Would it always be the same?
Her past seemed always haunted,
By her loneliness and shame.

How could she think this day was different?
She would fail again, she thought.
Her worthless feeling so persistent,
But then it's all that she'd been taught.

How could she break this crippling feeling,
She just prayed and held on tight.
Even though her heart was still reeling,
She would these feelings fight.

Her husband prayed, her heart did stir,
Hope grew from where she didn't know.
She wasn't what the world had thought of her,
And she knew that it would show.

The power that flowed from deep inside,
Was bringing strength and peace.
You could see it in her walk, the calmness of her stride,
The fear was still strong but somehow it seemed to cease.

Amazing warmth from within she began to feel,
Washing over like a blanket coming somewhere from above.
The Lord was there she knew it, but how could this be real,
She'd been told she was forsaken; yet she knew she felt His love.

The words they seem to flow but as if not her own,
She had a peace now, where fear it used to be.
For the power of God was clearly shown,
It left no doubt for anyone to could see.

Some might think then all was right,
That God had had His way.
And that her side had won the fight,
But that's not what happened that day.

The other side had lied and sought only to deceive,
Ignoring truth seeking only how to win.
Never thinking of the consequence they would one day receive,
Not caring at all that their action was clearly sin.

But they didn't win as some might think,
For the Lord was truly moving and He had His way.
Missed by most as if they did just blink,
God passed them by that day.

She knows that all is not really lost,
They haven't won anything at all.
They have no clue but they will pay the cost,
He'll lose her soon or he will heed the call.

So she will praise His Name,
And know life's trials often end like this.
When we feel Him move we never stay the same,
Where pain was felt now there is bliss.

She's learned to trust, she's learned to lean,
She's learned all her life she's been deceived.
She's learned God's there even if unseen,
She finally from Him fully received.



Chapter 20

Never too unclean

Leonard spent the major part of his life in solitude and shame. Hiding in the shadows, living in a leper village with others like himself, just waiting to die. In an understandably total hopeless state of mind. Some of us today find ourselves in a similar state. Sin in this world and in our lives has left us trapped in a place where we feel we are worthless or unclean. Most of us like the lepers of biblical times have no hope of anything changing and we like them are just waiting to die, never really living at all. But we, like Leonard, can see and hear the truth and it can set us free.

Leonard's life is recorded in the pages of God's word. He was a real man ministered to by a real person who he recognized as the Lord. Let's read about him in Matthew Chapter 8 verses 1-4 and see Leonard's story jump from the pages of God's word... Matt 8: 1-2 says When he came down from the mountainside

large crowds followed him. A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean

We first look in as they have come down from the mountainside where the Lord had given the Sermon on the Mount. Large crowds still gathered around Jesus. Many, I am sure feeling a sense of spiritual energy and excitement never experienced before in their lives, their minds racing with the thoughts of this man's words. Feeling a strange warmth as if pierced by an unknown force in their innermost being. Cutting into their hearts and laying bare their souls. They were ready to become all he had spoken of joining this new kingdom. Yes, they would that is if it is what the rest of the crowd did, for crowds don't often really think as much as they follow.

As the energy of the moment wore down, some began to look around and wonder, are we following the right man, are we standing for the right cause? Then they would begin to compare, most thought, I am sure I am doing better than most of the others here. Men always compare and yet rarely ever see what really is, only what they want to see. Then there were also those in their midst, you know them they scream "show me more, I need to see more" Still all in all most wanted to hear more of what this man had to say. What powerful teaching, what awesome words, and what authority He seemed to speak with. They thought, "Now show us you have the right to speak such words". In Matt 7: 28-29 we read When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, 29 because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law. He taught "as one who had authority" They still didn't see who he was or where his authority was from. So let's begin to look at this proof of His authority.

We still have this crowd mentality, moving as one all gathering around Jesus and wanting more. When all at once the crowd parted, something new has moved into their midst. Something unacceptable, something to be avoided at all cost. That something was our leper we have called him Leonard. Why did God bring a leper into their midst? Why not a cripple, a blind man or another illness? Because the teaching on the mountain had just hammered home the point of man's need to see his spiritual uncleanness and spiritual poverty or inability to change that uncleanness. Blessed are the poor in Spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. So how does that tie into leprosy? Let's look at how Leprosy was seen in that day?

Leprosy we read was "the outward and visible sign of the innermost spiritual corruption; a mere emblem in its small beginnings, its gradual spread, its internal disfigurement, its dissolution little by little of the whole body, of that which corrupts, degrades, and defiles man's inner nature, and renders him unable to enter the presence of a pure and holy God" (Maclear's Handbook O.T). The Leper was actually required to call out to passers-by "Unclean, Unclean" So that they might stay clear and avoid contamination.

Can you imagine people today calling out" Unworthy, Unable, Undone" or even the same words: Unclean, Unclean" Ever felt that way? Your life ever just stood still and you had to admit I am not who I thought I was spiritually I am not who others think I am. I sure have. I have looked into His word and had my heart revealed to me and it was not a pretty sight. I wanted to scream" Unclean, Unclean" please don't come near I don't even want to be near me and if you knew me you wouldn't want to be either. Ok, today maybe we wouldn't cry out, but we would sure feel the shame, the pain and hide in the shadows of our busy streets or possibly even in the back pews of our local church. Can you see this trend in the rapid growth of depression in our world? As we study this section God so clearly brings this point home.

Recently my good friend Lucy and I have struggled with some very difficult issues that seemed totally out of our control. I could see the despair slowly overtake her. Finally, she said it's not the situation that has me down its how it is the fact it makes me see myself. She explained how she saw this trial in our life as something she somehow deserved. The enemy had convinced her she was still there in the past still unclean

and unworthy. It wasn't the visible that had her down it was the invisible within her. Our form of Leprosy is often not visible to others, but it is to us. We live behind a veil as it were of deception and denial. We must go back again to: "Blessed are the Poor in Spirit." Do you see how that drives you to your knees and screams "Unclean, Unclean"? This is such a perfect example of our spiritual state. So what do we need to learn here?

Did this Leper come to Jesus and say with your help I will be ok? Or work with me here Jesus and get me out of this mess I am living in. Did he say to himself I could read a bunch of self-help books and think my way out of this mess? Maybe someone could tell him to just focus on all the good things and forget the bad things, then with a little help from you Jesus he will get better. Possibly he stood before Him and declared "his rights"? This Leprosy I have, this condition I am in, my terrible past, whatever it is, and it is so unfair you need to make it right I don't deserve this. Isn't that what many of us do today? He could have done any of these things, but he didn't. This Leper simply fell to his knees in the midst of a crowd that wished him gone and never to return. He knew clearly he wasn't wanted there and he really didn't want to be there either. This was so out of his comfort zone. But he also knew there was no other way, no other name by which he could be saved, no other chance to be made clean. He knew the truth and that is all that could set him free.

Can you see your uncleanness like that today? Can you really? Do you see deep down inside? Do you understand you are no cleaner than that religious hypocrite beside you who has never walked through the hell on earth you have endured? You are both so unclean inside just because you have never seen Jesus for who He is? We are all born unclean unholy and without any right to approach the living God. We are all so lost and yet because of what has happened to you, you can see it even more than most. Is that a curse or a blessing? Doesn't it actually make you feel more lost than ever? What a blessing though. If you can't see yourself as lost, well then from what do you need to be saved? How many in that crowd that day needed Him just as much as the Leper did, but could never see it? How many were just as infected spiritually as he was physically? Have you ever, now this may sound so strange but listen close, have you ever thanked God for what you have gone through that brought you to this feeling of UNCLEANNES? Have you? If you hadn't gone through the struggles, would you like the crowd that day only think wow what cool teachings we just heard? This guy speaks with wisdom like one who has authority. Would you have not seen Him as Lord the one with true authority?

Praise God this Leper saw himself as unclean. This Leper spoke with respect as he addressed the King, the teacher, the God-man Jesus. He said simply "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean" Let's break that down he said "Lord" not sir, not Mister, not my new friend Jesus. No No, he saw Him for who He was and is and always will be. Likely he had sat in the shadows unseen by most. He had listened to all Jesus had taught up on that glorious mountain. Now here he was before Him on his knees where he knew he belonged. He had nothing to offer nothing to barter with nothing to present as a reason to be heard. He simply said of his Lord "if you are willing," He didn't tell Jesus what to do. He first acknowledged His Godliness and Worthiness as in the Lords Prayer "Hallowed be thy Name or how Holy are you oh Lord" His words said it, his body said it, and we must assume his HEART said it too. Jesus sensed it too. The Leper went on to say if You, oh Lord are willing. Not do this Lord or intercede for me here Lord I know what is right just do it this way. But he was saying you are totally able and I believe that with my whole heart what I need to know Lord is, are YOU oh Lord willing. Is it your will not mine oh Lord is it yours? Again the Lords prayer says "Your WILL be done on earth as it is in heaven" or in me as it is in God. Not my will. Yes, Lord if it be your will, within your plan laid out before the creation of the universe. Then "You can make me clean" Was he crazy? What was he saying? This wasn't some normal sickness. This was terminal; you went away to die when you contracted leprosy. You were dying from the inside literally rotting to death with a flesh-eating cancer.

Yet isn't this just how God sees a sinner without Christ, someone who is dead but just doesn't know it yet? Most are dying and don't even know it. When confronted with the truth of God, we can see our cancer when someone right next to us can't. You think I don't belong anywhere near God I don't deserve anything good in this life. I will never be anything of value. You see we are all rotting on the inside, without Christ, a bad tree trying to bear good fruit in a life that is quickly fading away and going nowhere. Yet this man, this unclean Leper, knew in his HEART that the LORD, IF He was willing could in fact heal him and make him Clean. He wanted, yes needed, both healing and cleansing. You see to heal him would be just to make the outward effect of the inner infection disappear. But he was saying, Lord You can make me fully clean. Only one with true authority over the innermost cause of this sickness could heal it. Leprosy was thought to be a form of God's wrath on a person. So are you not in fact dealing with the heart of God looking into the heart of a man? This healing had to come in a form of regeneration as this sickness had rotted the flesh. It did not just healing of a disorder, but in fact a reversed its march toward death.

In other words you need to be as it were "Born anew or again". You need a new heart that God promises to put within us. Now the crowd had to be just stunned wondering what is Jesus going to do. He had said all the right words up on that mountain he had spoken "as one who had authority". Now what was He going to do, when all those words seem to require an action? Kind of like us, oh how easy it is to speak all the right words, hear all the right things, read all the right books. But when action is required what do we do? Jesus is our example lets see what He did.



Chapter 21

Compassionate response

Jesus was standing there for all to see, yet not to be seen. He never did what He did to be seen of men as we often do. He did it that His father might be seen or to reveal the nature of God to all mankind. His response to this fervent plea from a broken and contrite heart was personal, between Him and the leper. His answer we read in Matt 8:3 Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cured of his leprosy.

He reached out His hand. The touch of the master's hand the great physician, the only one who can make you clean. He reached out an active move on his part toward this one who was to be avoided being touched at all cost. Isn't that like Christ reaching towards those the world despises and finds untouchable? This again is a salvation example. Jesus had to do the reaching. Can you just imagine if this Leper would have dared to reach out to Jesus? He was to avoid at all cost physical contact and accept his state of uncleanness. As my former Pastor, David Holt would often tell us, "When you got saved you were not treading water in the sea of sin and despair while the love boat of salvation came by and threw you the life preserver of salvation that you were smart enough to grab hold of. No, you were dead on the bottom the ocean rotting and decaying (like this leper) unable, like all dead things to reach out to anything. When you were unable to reach out to Him, Jesus reached out to you." Wow! That is Grace. Notice that things that were dead and lepers are alike in being untouchable and making you defiled if you touch them? Not this time though, instead of becoming unclean by touching the leper, Jesus He made the leper clean. Like us, He takes our unrighteousness our sinfulness on himself and by it makes us clean and righteous.

Ever felt untouchable, maybe you even feel it right now? I sure have. But even more, have you looked upon those around you as untouchable or unclean? Me too. Not, Jesus, He reached out and He touched. Now He could have not reached out or touched him and instead just said, "Oh I will pray for you" or "I feel your pain" now go in peace. Isn't that what many do today? Maybe even you. But instead, He did what He was willing and able to do. He showed HIS POWER over the internal sickness, which is so equal to that sin inside each of us. Remember that He spoke as one with authority. He now showed that he, in fact, had the authority over leprosy; this of course was so symbolic of His power to clean us from within of our sin as well. Why was it not just a heal me Lord situation? Instead,, this untouchable person was asking his Lord if He was willing to make him clean or in fact set him free from that which was the cause of his sickness. This was clearly God revealing His heart to us. Showing us His will and His power. We like Leonard the leper are immediately made clean or made right or saved by Him with His touch.

The Word of God tells us in 2 Peter 1:3 His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness and in Ephesians 1:Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. These blessings we receive immediately, we are cleaned and then filled. We are then expected to walk in these new gifting what does that mean for you and me?

Let's look back at our biblical example what do we see here? A man dying in his current condition; a man with no hope of recovery, just pain and misery before him. Shame, guilt, and anguish his constant companions. A life of hell right here on earth, a burning desire to just get away or maybe just die. Can you relate? No hope before you, no chance for the life you desire, for any kind of joy in your life, just sorrow. But now you like the Leper are confronted by the King of Kings and yes, Lord of Lords. Can you do what he did? Do the only thing he could, falling to his knees and seeking the mercies of the Living God? Do we not see repentance here, a march toward certain death? Turned around by a miracle as it were a new birth or restoration/regeneration.

We must also think on this. There is this large crowd; excited about this powerful teaching and the spiritual buzz everyone was feeling. This Leper may well have had a covering on so that no one saw his condition. He threw it off and laid himself bare before Jesus, in front of all of them. In the presence of the Lord, he saw himself for who he really was. A miracle happened in the midst of this crowd, but did they see it for what it really was? Did they accept it?

Who would be the first to hug this man made clean by our Lord? How about you are you one of the crowd or are you the one with that covering and veil? Are you who people think you are or even whom

you think you are? Are you willing today to go before Jesus and call Him Lord? For that He truly is. Will you ask of Him as the Leper did Lord if YOU are Willing You can make even me Clean? Do want to be clean today? Do you want what you can't do but he can? Do you believe in the heart of God? If you do, you know He wants you clean. He wants you on your knees before him today asking if He is willing. You shall surely feel His touch and hear His small still voice say ... I AM WILLING... NOW DAUGHTER OF MINE, SON OF MINE..... BE CLEAN!!!!

Let that sink in for a moment. God says He is willing and you are CLEAN, can you accept it? That my friend is salvation! Not some magic prayer or raising of the hand, but a breaking of the heart receiving a new one.

You are Poor in Spirit Yet He is Rich. Let His Righteousness be yours today in Christ Jesus. You can be healed this very moment from within and the rotting flesh will be immediately restored and renewed. Now you may not feel it but you will know it as your life begins to change and how you see things change as well.

Jesus then says in verse 4 "See that you don't tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." Remember that crowd? This wasn't a freak show, an act for fame and recognition. This was a very personal act for this leper, a personal relationship. If you go screaming to the world I'm a Christian, I'm a Christian they will say you're a fool, you're a fool. So don't bother telling them to tell the priest. Hmmm, the priest so what does that mean? We read in 1 Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. So we as believers are priests and as such, you would show yourself to the believers. People who don't just talk the talk but you can see they walk the walk as well. No, not perfect but for sure different. You having been cleansed and or maybe restored if you have lost your first love and come back fully into the wonderful light. So go tell a believer/priest that you are one of them, a follower of the risen King.

Finally, what would be your offering today? For a new believer, that is baptism if one restored, then maybe a personal testimony. But it is a declaration to the priesthood of God, His believers. Then you need to take it to HEART and LIVE IT OUT!!! Be doers of His Word not hearer only deceiving yourself. Why were we made clean? Why were we filled with His gifts? 2 Peter goes on to say in verse 4 that Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

You are called to participate in His divine nature, not your past corrupted one. We are then to take hold of more and more of the blessings we were filled with so that as 2 Peter verses 8 and 9 tells us we can have and or warns us that we will miss. 8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.

We are called to be effective and productive in this new nature for Christ Jesus. We cannot forget we have been cleansed, but to be useful in the furthering of His Kingdom to His Glory forever and ever Amen.

Back in his day, the leper was an outcast of society especially the spiritual crowd. As we remember he is unclean, untouchable, unwelcome into society at all. Only the priest could readmit him into society. First, he was checked over to see if he was, in fact, clean, clear of outward evidence of an inward sickness. He was then sent away for a time then to come back and be rechecked. If he was at that time still clean he was officially readmitted into society. Like sin, there can sometimes be an appearance that it is gone and yet in time it returns as the change was only surface and for show, in time our fruit will show if the healing and

cleansing was from within or cosmetic only not being a true change of heart. Let us like him, walk in His fullness and let the world and the brethren see we are who he made us to be. They will know us by our Love!



Chapter 22

A Centurion sees the truth

Chase was a totally different story. This man had to be from a family of influence or he could not have been a Centurion. He also had to be a hardened soldier who ruled by fear and power. At times he had to pick one of his men and have nine others stone him to death for a crime committed in their midst who no one admitted to. He was as merciless in his training and treatment of his men as he was on the battlefield. What allowed a man like this to have any compassion left in him at all? Yet that is what we see in the Centurion of the scriptures found in Matthew Chapter 8 verses 5 -13. We have referred to him as Chase and related our story of his life. We don't really know what he felt or how he got this way or how he came to know Jesus. We did see though that he called Him Lord and recognized His power. This had to be done at a cost; no way a Centurion could acknowledge Jesus, as Lord and it not be seen. His superiors could not sit by and let this happen. They ruled by fear and demanded that people see them as a superior people as well their emperor as a god. So Chase had risked it all to call Him Lord and to seek help for his servant. So how does Chase's life impact us all and how do we like him need to see Jesus for what He really is and risk it all? Let's look again at the pages of scripture and see if it becomes any clearer. **Matt 8:5 *When Jesus entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, imploring Him. 6 and saying "Lord my servant is lying paralyzed at home, fearfully tormented."***

We see Jesus and his followers entering Capernaum, a city Jesus had adopted as His own after they rejected Him in Nazareth. So Jesus is in his own environment and in comes Roman, a Centurion. This man of great authority and power now humbles himself in front of all to ask for help from Jesus. As with the Leper, his first word is Lord, which says so much. Here is a man from a foreign nation ruling over the Jews, feared by even those close to him for this is how Centurions survived. Coming to a man who offered a new

twist on this strange religion, one that the Romans found equal to superstition. Now he calls this man, which most Jews didn't even see as Lord, to be the true Lord. He comes interceding for his servant who is paralyzed and fearfully tormented. This shows a lot about this man. He is a man of power and prestige, who cares deeply enough about the condition of his servant to travel a great distance to seek out the Lord. This challenges us in many ways. Are we willing for one, less than us in social position, to take time out of our lives - even to the point of traveling a great distance - to seek the Lord and then to actually intercede for him in faith? So he not only acknowledged that Jesus was Lord, but also that He was able to heal even the paralyzed and take away terrible pain resulting from fear.

Let's look again at what ailment the Lord uses to show His point. God is always in control, are we acknowledging Him? What is being paralyzed? It is the inability of the brain to send messages to the body in such a way so it will respond. So the body is unable to communicate with the head. Now the Bible tells us that Jesus is the head and we are the body. Is this not saying paralysis is equal to something coming between God and us? Isn't it interesting then that the Bible also tells us that sin breaks our fellowship or communication with God? Can you see God here? First, He deals with leprosy that is equal to sin and its impact on us physically and emotionally. Now paralysis, which is what sin, does to our spiritual relationship with God.

Has anything in your life caused you to be paralyzed, totally unable to move physically, emotionally or spiritually? You're just frozen. Be it from, fear, anxiety, or worry. Then because you are immobilized you also experience terrible pain or suffering. Ever gotten into or are currently in a situation that has you this frozen? You know you need to move, to get out, to run, but you just can't. Something has a stranglehold on you. You have tried in your own power, yet it leaves you wanting and still unable to break free.

Then because you can't leave or won't, you suffer unbelievable pain inside that maybe no one else can see. It rips your insides out. We see in this verse **"paralyzed at home, fearfully tormented."** You see how fear played into the being paralyzed. They go hand in hand, fear can cause one to be paralyzed or being paralyzed brings about tremendous fear. You can't go back, you can't go forward you are stuck right where you are. You find yourself afraid of everything and everyone around you. This is a state of hopelessness, desperation, and depression. This describes our lives without Christ. We are separated from your Lord, cut off from fellowship due very possibly to sin in our life. Seem like something that is real in our world today? The centurion or Chase as we have called him had a servant who was paralyzed and also suffered terrible pain, but he totally believed that Jesus could take that away and completely heal him.

Jesus shows compassion and says. **"I will go and heal him."** He is willing to leave his place of comfort and go with an enemy of the Jews to heal his servant of a paralyzing disorder. How does that work for you? Would you be willing to go out of your comfort zone to the house of your enemy to bring comfort to your enemy's servant? Do we do anything that makes us uncomfortable for someone else's good? Isn't this living out the teaching love your enemies? This is true religion; it is what we are called to do. How are we doing with it? You answer that one okay, I really don't want to as I have to take it to the Lord, for I often fail badly in this area. Jesus offers to go and the Centurion says "NO"!! Well, not really **"But the centurion said, 'Lord, I am not worthy for You to come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed.'**

Again we see the acknowledgment of Jesus' Lordship in this man's life. He sees his own spiritual condition next to Jesus and says, "I am not worthy" Oh if that could be the cry of more of our hearts. Lord, I don't deserve you or your presence. Isn't that just what being meek is all about? You must be poor in spirit to see you aren't worthy and have no spiritual RIGHTS. Then you move on to an attitude of meekness and says I DON'T DESERVE, I have NO RIGHTS. But today as always man cries "What about my rights, God that's not fair". In the book of James we are told that even when bad things befall you, you have no right to cry Lord that's NOT fair. You should say, Lord, I want all you have and whatever that means in my

life. Actually to count it all joy. Then say you are God alone and you have my life totally, I will accept all you have for me. I won't become paralyzed with fear when what I have done goes bad, or my choices catch up to me, or life itself just washes over me. I will set my eyes on you and hold fast to my knowledge of who you are Oh Lord.

Chase our centurion goes on now to speak of the authority he believes goes with this Lordship. You see calling Jesus Lord, but not attributing to Him the authority worthy of His title is useless. In the previous chapter we read, "many will say LORD LORD, but the Lord will say I never knew you" and of course that means they never knew Him either. Many call Him Lord but don't submit to His Kingship. He is truly Lord of all or not Lord at all. You have to believe He is who He says He is and can do what He says He can do. You need to study His word to understand this God man and set Him free of the limitations you have put on Him. Ever hear someone say God would not do that or not the God I believe in anyway?

On the back cover of Jethro Tull's, Aqua Lung album, it looked like scripture and read something like this: "In the beginning was man and man created God and in his image he created him." Sadly that is so true of many still today, even within the body of Christ. Many see only a God they want to see not who He really is. God's word is first and foremost given to man by God to reveal His nature and let you know Him. Even the act of the cross was planned before the foundation of the world in part that mankind might see God's heart and Love for Him. In [Ecclesiastes 3:14](#) ***I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that men will revere him.*** Do you hear that all that is done all that is written is so that we might know Him and revere Him? He lives in our praises. This is another reason we read in so many places not to worry or be anxious. Matt 6:25 tells us don't worry. Worry is a way of saying, God, you are not really God if you were and were in control I could trust you. Matt 21:21 says I ***tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt*** and Romans 14:23 goes as far as calling doubt sin and condemning it But ***the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.*** You see doubt is questioning God's ability to be God. Consequently, it calls into question His ability to save, as well as lead or be sovereign or any other attribute of our Lord and King.



Chapter 23

Faith like no other

This Centurion says but *just say the word, and my servant will be healed*. He sees Jesus as Lord and then put his faith in Him. He sees Him as one who is not limited by time and space. In Col 1:16 we read about Jesus that "*by him, all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him*". So this Jesus was the one who spoke all things into existence. By His Word, all things came into being and this Centurion sees Him able to, by His word, heal his servant from any distance. He knows if Jesus but speaks it, it will be accomplished. Now that is faith. Faith is putting into action with your heart what your mouth so easily professes. How many of us say wonderful things about what we believe, but then when we are tested we doubt, we worry, and we do not trust in our King as LORD? Well, the Centurion did. He goes on to explain about his own authority and acknowledges Jesus' authority over whatever it is that is paralyzing his servant and causing him fear. What is causing you to be paralyzed today? What is causing you to be fearful? Jesus is still able to save, heal and restore. He has the authority if you just see it in Him. You have a right to be set free. No longer held captive by your paralyzing situation or the fear that accompanies it. Even now call out and say "*Jesus, but just say the word, and I will be healed.*" Then believe it with all your heart and it will be yours.

This kind of faith is what each of us needs and God desires of us. We read how Jesus responded in verse 10 now *when Jesus heard this, He marveled and said to those who were following, "Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel*. He marveled when he heard this. He turned to His followers pointing out how remarkable this was. What made it special? It was the depth of this man's belief. This man unlike those of Israel found Him to be God, not just a great man a great teacher, but also one with the authority He had spoken with. This was not just faith, but great faith. He told Jesus you don't need to come and in fact, I have no right for you to come. He said you are able to heal the paralyzing effect on my servant. I came here to intercede for him. This is faith different than that like the leper. He believed Jesus could just speak it and it would be done because Jesus had that kind of authority. This man saw it and believed it with all his heart. But the people of God, the nation he had blessed for hundreds of years, the children of Abraham did not see Him like this. They could not see past what they wanted Him to be, to see what He really was and still is today. Today many in His church don't see Him as clearly as those on the outside looking in. They have spiritual eyes to see that those inside don't have. Yet we act so high and mighty like we are so spiritual, so righteous. We look down on those who don't act, or worship, or sing or

believe like we do. Let's look further at what Jesus says.

In verse 11 and 12 we read ...**11 "I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; 12 but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."** this is a reference to the children of Israel. Those who believed that they were born into salvation like the teachers of the law in their day. The scripture tells us that faith is seen as righteousness. We see this in Romans; 4: 5, 9 where we read that faith is credited to us as righteousness and then we read in Romans 4:13 that **It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.** Again in Romans 9:30 **what then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, righteousness that is by faith** We see Jesus saying the same thing here. Abraham's offspring the nation of Israel will not receive the promise, which is salvation and/or membership in God's Kingdom/family by following the law. They will show up in heaven at the throne seat on judgment day expecting, because of who they are, that they will stay in heaven. Yet Jesus says clearly that sons of the kingdom or better said, would be sons of the kingdom, biological children of Abraham will be cast into outer darkness or hell. This takes us back to a very key verse in Matt chapter 5 verse 20 **"For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.**

So the scribes and the Pharisees will go to hell, as their self-righteousness is not sufficient. We see that faith is credited as righteousness and righteousness that is sufficient is by faith. We can then say your faith better exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees. So when Jesus uses this reference He is clearly saying this is the kind of faith you need to be in my Kingdom now and later. This faith doesn't worry, this faith doesn't doubt, this faith doesn't limit God. Okay, so you say I don't have that kind of faith. Do you see Him as Lord? Do you have a relationship with Him that allows you to know Him? Then you just need to begin today to work out your salvation through fear and trembling. In other words, allow Him to work out in you what He has begun. Your faith need not be perfect, but it needs to fully believe that He is Lord. Let His Holy Spirit have its way in you and begin to believe Him for the little things and ask Him to keep testing you so that your trust might grow. Let James 1 be true in you. Count it joy, as Gods trials cause you to be one who **" asks in faith without any doubting because that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord.** The man who doubts and doesn't see God, as God.

After Jesus made this point clear to those following Him He turned to the Centurion and said **"Go; it shall be done for you as you have believed."** and then we read **the servant was healed that very moment.** Jesus assures Chase, our Centurion that it will be just as he believed it or had faith it would be. This constituted Jesus speaking the WORD and the servant was healed and set free of his fears that tormented him that very moment. No longer was the communication from the head unable to reach the body. When Jesus speaks and it is done! Nothing can stand before the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Nothing, this includes sickness, disease, anything physical, spiritual, emotional, or psychological. Jesus is greater and has authority over all. He is truly Lord of all. Do you believe that today? You can be made clean today and released from that fearful state that has held you fast paralyzed as it were, to go forward and feel able to receive anything of value or worth. You can be set free and experience His Joy as you begin to dwell in Him and in His Kingdom. Begin today to as we read in Proverbs 3: 5-8 **Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your body and refreshment to your bones.** Trust Him with all that you are, lean fully on Him, not on anything in you. Acknowledge Him in all that you do in this life. Let Him make your crooked paths straight. For a change don't feel you have all the answers. Have a reverential fear for the Living God and actively turn away from evil things and YOU WILL HAVE HEALING AND RESTORATION. Praise God!!



Chapter 24

Conclusion

So we have walked together with our four characters, seen their lives played out on a God directed stage. As we have seen Leonard or so we called him, was a real life leper who found his way into the pages of scripture. His once normal life was changed by conditions out of his control. Then, in the end, his life was changed because of how he saw Jesus. What he came to believe about His power and authority over the real source of his illness. Chase was the name we gave the Centurion and again he found his way into God's word for similar reasons. Both these men's lives were changed forever because of what they came to see as true about Jesus Christ. That He was in fact the Lord and worthy of believing in. Their lives were somehow forever interwoven in a moment's time. Together their faith in Him was the instrument used in the healing that took place.

Ron and Lucy though not their real names, are real people and their lives were both crushed by the disappointments of life. Then they were also forever changed like these two men in scripture, through their agreement with them in the Lordship of Jesus Christ. They both found their lives at times hopeless and full of despair. Seeing themselves as unclean and unworthy until they too fell at the feet of Jesus and called Him Lord. Believing He could change their lives and He did. Being made clean they found themselves still at times paralyzed with fear from life in general, a horrid past, or poor choices ending in sin.

No matter the reasons, they were there and like Chase they found that it took only Jesus word spoken to set them free. God moved Ron and Lucy down different paths acting out their lives on different stages. Then at His appointed time He brought them together. Knowing just how it would all play out. Meeting too early or too late would have had far different results. That's the way our God is though, and it is why we must trust Him fully in all things. As I said they are still friends to this day. Though walking down different paths and different results of the healing. Lucy is now happily married and finally free and growing stronger daily. Ron is unbound from life's never ending struggles and serving God touching lives and being a light.

My sincere prayer for you today is that somehow God has used the lives of these four people portrayed in the pages of this book to reach you where you are and give you hope. That if you like Leonard see you as unclean, you will like him see Jesus as Lord. Then you too will throw yourselves at His feet and find Him

willing.

So life throws you a curve and you for whatever reason find yourself strained and separated from God. I pray that like Chase you now know that it takes just His word spoken to set you free. If you are there today, know this, Jesus can and will set you free, cleanse you and transform you into a vessel worthy of being in His presence.

Receive Him as Lord and submit to Him as you come to dwell in His Kingdom forever and ever, or if you already know Him but have somehow lost your way, come back He is right here waiting for you.

I pray God richly blesses you and uses you to be a blessing to many as He touches the lives of people through you and takes back His Kingdom. May God reach out and touch you right where you are today. He is willing to speak the Word and you will be Set Free, as you too become Interwoven Through Time into God's tapestry of life.

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