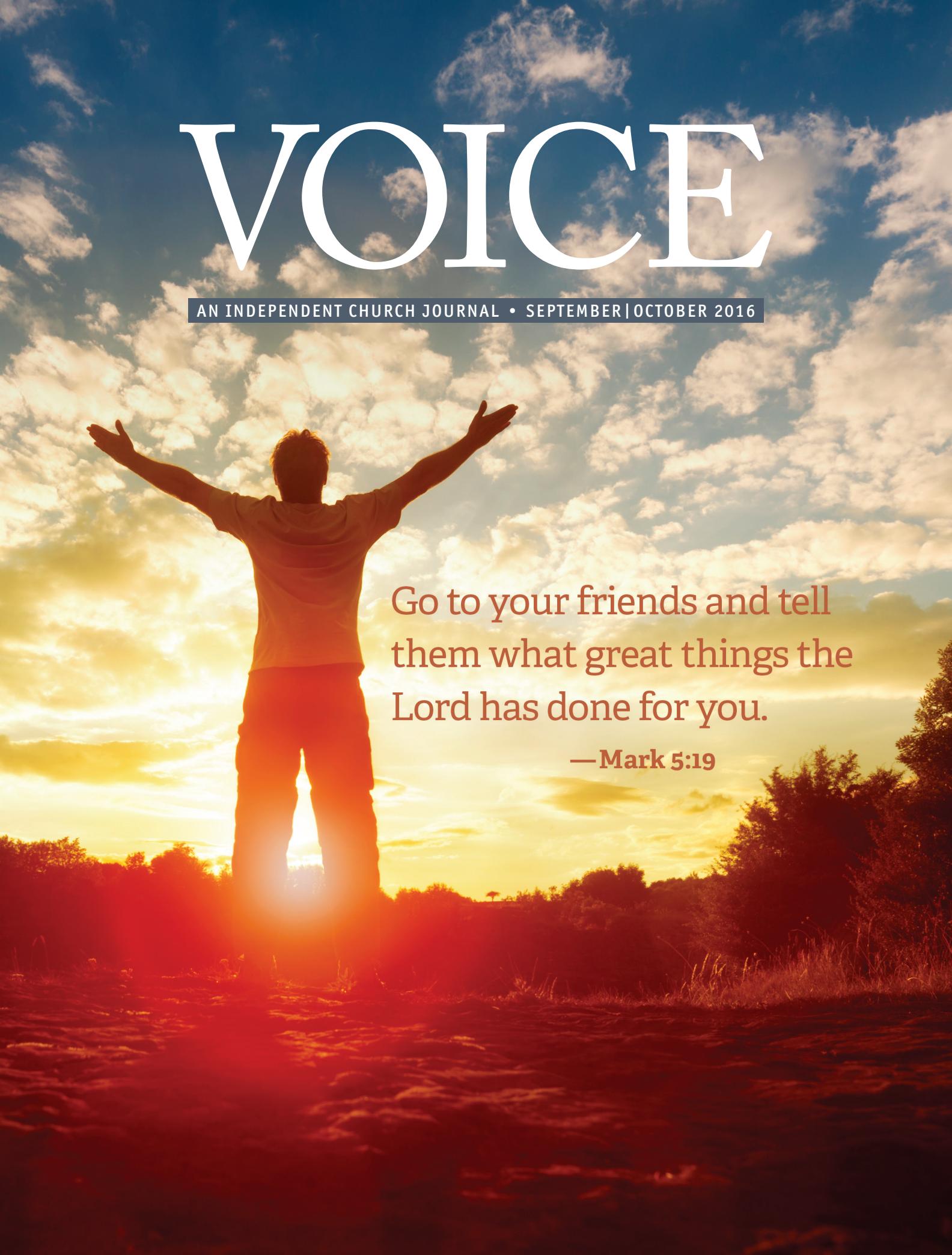


# VOICE

AN INDEPENDENT CHURCH JOURNAL • SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2016

A photograph of a man from behind, standing in a field with his arms raised towards the sky. He is silhouetted against a bright, cloudy sunset. The sky is filled with large, white and yellow clouds. The horizon shows a line of trees and a field in the distance.

Go to your friends and tell  
them what great things the  
Lord has done for you.

—Mark 5:19



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# Testimony of My Salvation



Les Lofquist  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**O**n October 2, 1972 I was born again when I placed my faith in Jesus Christ as my Savior and was regenerated by the power of the Holy Spirit. I trusted Christ as my Savior as an 18 year old, after searching and stumbling through my life, sensing my lostness, with an acute emptiness of soul.

I was born May 26, 1954 into a stable, loving, well disciplined family with seven children (two older sisters, two younger sisters, an older brother and a younger brother). My mother and father were always loving and supportive and provided great wisdom in many ways. My parents and both sets of grandparents were successful in business and marriage. But by the time I matured, ours was not a church going family, and so I looked to other activities for fulfillment. Football, basketball, baseball, golf, music and girls (not in that order) were the most important things in my shallow existence.

During high school in Winona, Minnesota, I came in contact with some vibrant Christians who shared with me the message from the Bible about God's good news of salvation. Those four girls were faithful in speaking the truth to me from God's Word. But I resisted them and for a year and a half, I mocked their message. Then the month after high school graduation, in July 1972, I began reading the gift New Testament that my Christian friends had given me. My deep antagonism toward God ceased. It was followed by curiosity, then amazement, then crisis: Would I believe?

It was two agonizing months of struggle for me with pride and unbelief and sin until I finally trusted Christ as Savior in the Fall of 1972. The eternal transaction was made on a Monday night in my basement bedroom, after I talked to IFCA Pastor Joseph Sebeny in his home. Talking to Pastor Sebeny was something my Christian friends urged me to do, but visiting

a pastor in his parsonage home to talk about the Bible seemed so strange to me.

Yet on that Monday morning forty-four years ago I felt overwhelmed by conviction and misery and abandoned my prideful resistance. I called Pastor Sebeny on the phone and introduced myself. I said almost these exact words: *"I am a friend of four girls from your church. They have talked to me about the Bible for a long time, and I am really confused. I want to know if I can meet with you and you can answer my questions...but I only want you to use the Bible and not your denomination's teachings or your church's dogma."* (Where did that word "dogma" come from? I don't know. But I had gone to Pastor Sebeny's church about a year earlier to watch a Christian movie on a Sunday night. After the movie ended, Pastor Sebeny spoke and he scared me; he was so certain of everything and quite passionate, especially about heaven and hell.)

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*My deep antagonism toward God ceased. It was followed by curiosity, then amazement, then crisis: Would I believe?*

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But on Monday, October 2, 1972 I no longer cared that Pastor Sebeny scared me. And he over the telephone assured me that he indeed could open the Bible and answer my questions. He agreed to meet with me, and we set a meeting for 7:00 pm that evening. Relieved that was over, I hung up the phone and immediately realized: "Oh no, tonight is Monday Night Football!" However, I knew how desperate I was when I just shrugged my shoulders and thought, "I don't care about football! I need answers about God from the Bible."

I went to Pastor Sebeny's house at the

appointed time and, out of embarrassment, parked my car around the corner a block away. He lived on the busy street right across from my old High School, and I didn't want anyone seeing my car parked in front of his house: *"is Les Lofquist talking to that Fundamentalist pastor about the Bible?!"?*

I rang the doorbell, and I wondered if Pastor Sebny would yell at me for having long hair and wire-rimmed glasses. But he greeted me at the door and quickly invited me in without even a sideways glance at my appearance. He directed me to his living room couch and we got right to it without a lot of small talk. I don't remember all the details about that evening, but I do remember him placing a Bible on my lap and directing me to verses such as Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23, Ephesians 2:8-9 and 1 John 5:13. Pastor Sebny would point to the pages and firmly (strongly!) say things like: "Read it! What does it say? What does that mean? You're smart. You got good grades. You know what it says."

I needed his direct, New Jersey style to break through my wall of pride. I felt like a football player getting tough answers from my coach, and I responded well to Pastor Sebny. His no-nonsense way of presenting Bible-based answers was exactly what my foolish pride needed. I am so grateful God sent that East Coast strong man to meek, little Winona, Minnesota to confront this arrogant young man with God's assessment of my life and humanistic world view. I was listening carefully to what God said in His Word.

After nearly two and a half hours of talking, Pastor Sebny asked me if I wanted to place my faith in Christ as my Savior *right there on his couch!* Wow, was that ever an aggressive question. That was something I would never do in front of someone: talk right out loud to God and confess my sin and my hopelessness and ask for God's forgiveness and admit I wasn't as smart as I thought I was and that I needed a Savior from MY SIN.

I quietly told Pastor Sebny that I would do it at home. Pastor Sebny said I had better do it, and "it better be tonight before it is too late." I said I would. He said, "okay, but you should do it right here, right now if you really

mean business with God." Oh I meant business with God, that was for sure! But I didn't want to do business with God while a man from New Jersey I barely even knew listened in. After a few minutes of prodding, Pastor Sebny prayed and it was over. I stood up from his couch and left. And as I was standing in his doorway, he said, "You better do it tonight before it's too late! And if you do trust Christ, call me tomorrow. Call me. Do you understand?"

Oh, I understood. That was for sure. How could a Minnesotan not understand him?

I quickly, but gratefully, left. I felt the HUGE burden of my heart was gone, and I knew exactly what needed to be done. I had to do business with God, and I had to hurry home to where that eternal transaction would take place. I nearly ran down his front steps, turned left on the sidewalk and skipped around the corner on my way to my carefully parked car. I definitely remember that

as I got close to my car, I jumped for joy and smacked a low-hanging tree branch. I felt free! For the first time in my life I had the answers to my deepest questions, and I felt free as a bird!

I drove immediately home and went straight down to my bedroom. I knelt at the foot of my bed and confessed my sin and my foolish pride and trusted Christ as my Savior. No one told me to kneel but it seemed the thing for my now repentant, humble heart to do.

The next morning I called Pastor Sebny and told him what happened the night before. I did business with God. I trusted Christ as my Savior. Pastor Sebny didn't sound happy, but extremely insistent. Urgent. I had to come to church "every time the doors are opened, starting tomorrow night at 7:00pm. Bring a Bible and a notebook and take notes. Every time. Don't miss church. Ever." Then he told me to come to his house right away because he had some things for me. I was there in a matter of minutes.

## LES LOFQUIST'S ITINERARY

### September

- 11 Bethany Bible Church, Belleville, MI
- 15-17 BMW Utah Field Conference, Salt Lake City, UT
- 18 Rocky Mountain Bible Church, Brigham City, UT
- 25 Western Grove (AR) Bible Church  
Rock Haven Bible Camp Youth Workers Conference, Hasty AR
- 26 Rock Haven Bible Camp Youth Workers Conference, Hasty AR
- 27 Ozark IFCA Regional, Hasty, AR
- 29-30 Calvary University Board Meetings, Kansas City, MO

### October

- 2 Sutter Salem Bible Church, Warsaw, IL
- 9 Decatur (MI) Bible Church
- 17-19 Shepherds Theological Seminary 360 Conference, Cary, NC
- 23 Bible Baptist Church, Calera, AL

### November

- 8 IFCA Leadership Summit, Grandville, MI
- 9-11 IFCA International Board Meetings, Grandville, MI
- 13-16 FIM Field Conference in Guadalajara, Mexico with Steve Wilt

Pastor Sebny gave me five or six (or ten) Gospel pamphlets. "Make sure you've done this! Make sure you read all these and your decision is a true one!" Then he gave me a stack of Radio Bible Class pamphlets, which were transcribed sermons from M.R. DeHaan and Richard DeHaan. They covered theological topics in a concise, simple, Bible-based way. I devoured those things that afternoon and kept asking for more.

My first meeting at church as a true believer was on Wednesday night, October 4, 1972. Pastor Sebny was there, up front, with a 4' x 6' blackboard covered with white-chalk notes: "THE TIMES OF THE GENTILES – LUKE 21:24; DANIEL 9:27; 12:7" There, on that chalk-board, began my life-long quest to comprehend all the mysteries of the universe: Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel, Jews, Gentiles, God, visions, the world, eternity. I wrote everything down like a mad man, every so often sneaking a peek at the fourteen unimpressed old men and old ladies: "why aren't they writing?! Pastor Sebny told me to bring a notebook and write everything down that he would be teaching. Why isn't everyone as overwhelmed with The Times of the Gentiles as I am?!"

That night I learned an important lesson. Not every Christian is as concerned as they should be with the wonderful truths from God's Word. Not every Christian is hanging on with white knuckles to be sure they know what God says in order to obey Him. Not every Christian takes God seriously. Many professing Christians are bored to the point of apathy. But I sure didn't want to be that way! He saved my miserable, arrogant, mocking soul from the judgment of the flames of the Lake of Fire. How could I respond in any other way than with a white hot passion to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ?

My life changed. I mean, it REALLY changed. I had forgiveness of sin. I had hope. I had a new perspective. I had meaning and purpose in life. I could now live for God and His glory alone. I was forgiven of much, and I loved Him much. I wanted to let everyone know I was a new man, so I told everyone what happened. Then I did something really radical: I got a hair-

cut. I no longer wanted to identify with my old life, my old philosophy, my old friends. I wanted to eliminate the symbol of my pride and arrogance. And in 1972, believe it or not, my long hair was my fist in the face of all things conservative (including God and the Bible).

Without anyone saying a thing, two or three days after becoming a Christian, I joyfully got a haircut, thus declaring to the world: "I am no longer walking as a rebellious young man. I have been humbled by the almighty hand of God. And I am rejoicing!" My parents took notice of that, and they were surprised. When I stopped listening to depressing and angry music, they really took notice. When I explained from whence all these changes came, they were not impressed. They did not support me going to "that Fundamentalist church."

---

*I wanted to let everyone know  
I was a new man, so I told  
everyone what happened.  
Then I did something really  
radical: I got a haircut.*

---

A month after my salvation, I attended the Missions Conference at Calvary Bible Church in Winona. Even though it was a church of under 75 people and only had one missionary in attendance at the Missions Conference, my heart was stirred. The day after the conference ended, Pastor Sebny asked me what I thought of the Missions Conference. I told him I loved it and I loved that missionary. Then he said something that shocked me and totally changed my life. "You'd be a good missionary or pastor." I remember responding, "ME?! A missionary or pastor?!" In my mind I felt so unworthy of such a high and holy calling. But in my heart I screamed out, "That's exactly what I want to do!"

I asked Pastor Sebny how you became a missionary, and he told me you had to first go to Bible College. I exclaimed, "you mean they have colleges where you only study the Bible?" I was so excited. He told me about a school in Michigan where Chris Bauer was

already enrolled (a young man who grew up just around the corner from my house and was saved a year and a half earlier through the testimony of those same four girls and). Three months later I registered at Grand Rapids School of Bible and Music (GRSBM), beginning my life-long quest to study God's Word, obey God's Word and teach God's Word.

At GRSBM I became Chris Bauer's room-mate; in him God gave to me a life-long friend and brother. At GRSBM I studied under great men of God and found life-long mentors like Dr. Ron Manahan and Church Planting Missionary Ron Thompson. And at GRSBM I met Miriam Ransom, my life's mate and faithful partner in our wonderful journey with Christ.

Along the way I also had confirmed in my heart and mind the call of God into ministry. After my education at GRSBM and Grace College and Grace Theological Seminary in Winona Lake, Indiana, I began my life of service that ultimately led me to this ministry position in 1999.

Forty-four years after my new life began, I offer God my deepest and most profound gratitude. I was an arrogant mocker and so unworthy of His grace. But God saved me and cleansed me and prepared me. And He has used me. He alone is to be praised!

In the words of John Newton: "I have come to realize I am a great sinner and He is a great Savior."

# Chosen Fruit: My Testimony



Arnold Fruchtenbaum

## Dr. Arnold

Fruchtenbaum is the founder and director of Ariel Ministries. He has been an IFCA member for 49 years and Ariel Ministries is an IFCA member organization. He attended Shelton College and then graduated from Cedarville College, Dallas Theological Seminary (Th.M.) and New York University (Ph.D.). He is the author of eight books, including his masterful work *Israelology*:

The Missing Link in Systematic Theology, as well as a vast number of articles and other resources available at [www.ariel.org](http://www.ariel.org). His insights into Scripture are profound and all IFCA members need to know about his ministry.

**EDITOR'S NOTE** Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum's last name in German means "fruit tree." He was born in 1943 in Siberia, Russia into a devoutly observant Jewish family. His testimony of coming to faith in Yeshua the Messiah is an exciting account of Arnold being chosen fruit, by God, for His glory.

Many reading these words of mine have heard testimonies about how people came to face the issue of Yeshua the Messiah, but there is a marked difference between a Gentile believer's testimony and the testimony of a Jewish believer. Gentile believers will often begin with their own childhood or perhaps go back to their own birth. A Jewish believer's testimony must begin much earlier.

## INTRODUCTION

When a Jew is faced with the messianic proclamations of Yeshua, it raises issues and questions that have their origins in century old teachings. Every Messianic Jewish testimony really has its beginnings with the following words of Yeshua: "Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying: 'If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace. But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation'" (Luke 19:41-44 NKJV).

"And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled" (Luke 21:24 ASV).

Forty years after Yeshua spoke these words, the Roman legions invaded the land. After a two-year siege, the city of Jerusalem was destroyed in a fashion which exactly fulfilled the prophecy quoted above. From that point on, the history of the Jewish people goes through the period which is known as the Diaspora: the

worldwide scattering of the Jews and the beginning of centuries of persecution. Not only were people forced out of the land, they also found that they were continually forced to move from place-to-place and country-to-country. The history of the Jews from that time on has been one of continual escape from anti-Semitic persecutors. Soon as they would settle in one corner of Europe, an anti-Semite would gain control of the area and use his authority to either kill Jews or to force them to leave in search of new homes elsewhere. And so the words of Moses came true, to the very letter, that the Jews would be scattered and tossed to and fro among all the nations of the earth (Deuteronomy 4:27-29; Leviticus 26).

*Gentile believers will often begin with their own childhood or perhaps go back to their own birth. A Jewish believer's testimony must begin much earlier.*

One of the great tragedies of Jewish persecution is that from about the 4th century onwards virtually all persecution was committed in the name of Jesus Christ, the church, and the cross. It is because of so much Jewish suffering that a major barrier has arisen in the minds of Jewish people between "us" and "them"—the "them" being Gentiles or Christians (these terms being synonymous to most Jews) who worship a God called Jesus in whose name they persecute and kill Jews. This is the background most Jewish people have to deal with when they come face-to-face with the issue of Yeshua, and they are the issues that I would personally experience as well.

Let me begin my testimony by explaining the Fruchtenbaum family history.

## ROOTS

In the 17th through 19th centuries, Poland opened up to Jewish refugees escaping from persecution in other areas of Europe. By the time of World War I, the Jewish community of Poland numbered some three million people and was the largest such community in the world. Within this community, a religious sect began to grow and eventually permeate the whole of Judaism. These people became known as the Chasidim (literally “Pious Ones”), the Ultra-Orthodox, always to be seen in black with large furry hats, long beards, and side-curls, their traditional garb. After the founder of the movement died, it split into several divisions, based primarily on geography.

Among the leaders of one of these divisions (known as Gerer Chasidim) were men of the Fruchtenbaum family. My grandfather and his father, and so on, were among the leaders of this group. To become a leader, my grandfather underwent rigorous training and memorization. The Scriptures served merely as a base of study, and he was to spend his life studying the books of the rabbinic traditions. His entire understanding of the Scriptures was determined by these writings and by the interpretations of rabbis from centuries before. He was never really able to read a text and hear what it plainly said. His interpretation was always controlled by Jewish tradition. For this reason, although he knew the Scriptures so well, he was never able to see the Messiahship of Yeshua in them.

Some idea of how much authority my grandfather had among the Ultra-Orthodox can be gained from the tomato debate. Tomatoes, like corn and tobacco, were discovered in the New World and then taken back and introduced in Europe. Tomatoes did not reach some parts of Poland until after World War I. The question then arose: “Are they kosher?” This was a big debate for the Orthodox Jewish people of that time. Was it permissible for a Jew to eat a tomato? The Bible makes no mention of them, and no one had ever seen one before. So were they kosher or not?

Finally, a delegation was formed and sent to my grandfather to decide the issue. He told them to come back in a week. During that week, he went out, bought some tomatoes, took them home, and studied them. He cut them up and looked at their color, their seeds, and so on, consulted his books of traditions and rabbinical writings, and finally decided they were, indeed, kosher. Thus, his community has been eating tomatoes ever since.

## MY FATHER

My grandfather died of appendicitis shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War. After my grandfather’s death, my father began to be groomed to take over the leadership. He began the same kind of training that my grandfather had undertaken, particularly in memorizing the Scriptures.

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*He managed to escape from Poland into Russia, but the Russians were showing the Jews no more mercy than the Germans.*

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My father’s training was interrupted in 1939 when the Germans invaded Poland and World War II broke out. He managed to escape from Poland into Russia, but the Russians were showing the Jews no more mercy than the Germans. They accused my father of being a Nazi spy and transported him to a Siberian prison camp where he remained for the next two years. In 1941, the Germans attacked Russia, and a new phase of war began. The Russians needed the support of the Polish government that was in exile in Britain. The Polish Government-in-Exile promised their support on the condition that the Russians release all Polish citizens from their concentration camps. As a Polish citizen, my father was released; however, since at that time Germany dominated much of western Russia, he decided to remain in Siberia until the end of the war. He survived by using the skills he had learned as a young man when he was apprenticed to a photographer. The war and Stalin’s policy of mass transportation of his own population created a need for passports and

other official documents requiring photographs. Everyone needed photos, and my father was therefore able to receive a steady income. This was also how he met my mother. She, too, had been forced to flee to Siberia and needed pictures for official papers. A few months later, they were married. When I was born on September 26, 1943, I was given the Russian name Arichek Genekovich Fruchtenbaum.

## THE RETURN TO POLAND

When World War II came to an end, all Polish citizens were given permission to return to their home country and my parents decided to make the move back. I was three years old at the time. The long road back led through the Ukraine. There, my mother caught typhus fever and had to be hospitalized. In order for his family to survive, my father had to find work and was forced to put me into an orphanage. There was a severe famine in the area at that time. Very little food was available and none for the orphanage. Children were dying of starvation. But at the end of every day, my father came to the orphanage with two pieces of bread for his son. Although I was reduced to skin and bone, by my father’s resourcefulness, I survived. Eventually, my mother recovered, and we completed our journey back to Poland. We moved back to a small Jewish ghetto surrounded primarily by the Roman Catholic Church. Our stay there lasted less than one year.

My father was able to meet up with those members of his family who had survived the Holocaust. He was one of 13 siblings, seven of whom had died, six in the Holocaust. He found one brother and three sisters. One sister had lost her husband, and the brother had lost his wife and only child. A second brother had managed to escape to Israel during the course of the war. The others had all perished, along with spouses and children: some in the Warsaw Ghetto; some in Auschwitz; some were shot in the Ponari Forest near Vilna; most died in Treblinka.<sup>1</sup>

A few months after our return to Poland, we were due to celebrate our first Passover since the war. It was now the year 1946. This was to be an especially important and significant

Passover since we were to celebrate both our redemption from Egypt and also our redemption from Germany. And so we were looking forward to it in a very special way. During the eight days of Passover, we were to eat only unleavened bread, and so our mothers began to bake in preparation for Passover.

At the same time, a small three-year-old Roman Catholic child disappeared and the rumor was spread by the priests that the Jews needed the blood of a Christian to make unleavened bread. This rumor was spread all over Poland and on the first night of Passover as we sat down to eat, there were mobs forming in the streets outside, organized by the police and led by the church hierarchy. All over Poland, violent mobs attacked Jewish ghettos, including the one I was living in. On that night of Passover 1946, throughout Poland, many Jews were killed in the name of Jesus Christ. It was under those circumstances that I first heard His name - not as someone who came to die for me, but someone for whom I almost had to die.

As the mobs broke down the doors of Jewish homes (ours was not one of them), there were priests standing by, waving big crosses, and before killing a Jew, they would shout in Polish the commonly heard line: "You killed Christ, and so we will kill you." It was in those words that I first heard about Jesus.

It was because of this experience that a barrier began to grow in my mind which separated "us" from "them." I wanted little to do with the Christian or Gentile world. The only Jesus I knew about was the hateful, murderous Jesus presented by the Christian church and not the real Jesus of the New Testament.

#### ESCAPE FROM POLAND

When the Israeli Underground heard about what had happened in Poland, they began to formulate a plan to rescue as many Jews as possible from behind the Iron Curtain. Bribing the Polish border police, they came to an "arrangement" that for a period of thirty days, any Jew would be allowed free passage across the border.

My parents heard through the Underground that they had thirty days to leave and decided to do so. Carrying our belongings on our backs, we joined

a group of other Jews and began the long trek on foot to the border. When we arrived, we were stopped by the Polish border police. We identified ourselves as Jews, and the men put their guns behind their backs and turned and raised their eyes skyward, thus pretending not to see us, so we were free to cross over into Czechoslovakia. I discovered later the cost of our crossing...it was nothing more than a few cartons of American cigarettes. These were rather expensive in Eastern Europe at the time, and a carton of Camels was enough to secure the freedom of a Jewish family. While cigarettes may have endangered the lives of many others, they undoubtedly saved mine!

After crossing into Czechoslovakia, things were a little disorganized for a while, but one-by-one the Israeli Underground rounded us up and organized us into a walking party. Under their direction, we walked through the Czechoslovak forest, heading for the Czech-Austrian border where similar "arrangements" had been made with the border police. It took several weeks for us to cross Czechoslovakia, from the Polish border to the Austrian border, and it was on the day before we arrived at the border that the Czechoslovak government collapsed and the Communists took over. As soon as they gained power, the Czech border guards, who had been bribed, were removed and replaced by Russian guards with whom no deals had been made. The Israeli Underground told us to sit tight while they went to the border to investigate. What they discovered was that the Russians were under very strict orders to allow no one through except for Greeks returning home from concentration camps. When the Underground returned to our hiding place, they instructed us to burn anything and everything which had our name on it. That night, passports, birth certificates and all other documents went up in smoke.

The next morning, we headed for the border. None of us were Greek, none of us could speak a single word of Greek, but then, neither could the Russians! With this simple subterfuge, we safely crossed into Austria - all except one member of the Israeli Underground who was shot and killed at the very last moment. Since that time, I

have applied the words of Romans 1:16 to myself in a special way: "I was a Jew first, but also a Greek!"

---

*That night, passports, birth certificates and all other documents went up in smoke.*

---

Once in Austria, the American Military Police took over from the Israeli Underground, escorted us through Austria to West Germany and placed us in the first of several British Displaced Persons camps, where we spent the next five years. We were kept from going to Israel because it was at this time that the Jews of Israel were fighting the British for independence. We remained in Germany until 1951, when we were given visas to immigrate to America.

It was three years prior to this, in 1948, that an incident occurred which would prove to be a significant factor in my life, causing me to be confronted with the issue of the Messiahship of Yeshua. Working among the Jews in the camps was a Lutheran minister named Theophil Burgstahler, and his daughter Hanna, who provided clothing and humanitarian aid for new refugees from behind the Iron Curtain.

When Theophil heard that we had applied to immigrate to America, he had with him the October 1948 edition of a Messianic Jewish magazine titled *The Chosen People*. On the cover was the address of the New York headquarters of this particular organization. Theophil tore the cover off and gave it to my mother, telling her that when she got to New York she should contact these people since they would be able to help us. My mother did not quite understand exactly what this organization was; she simply assumed that it was for providing assistance to Jewish immigrants in America. It was indeed that, but it was also a little more than that. By the time she realized her "mistake," it was too late—as far as I was concerned anyway. In 1951, the Fruchtenbaum family, which now included a second son and a daughter, left West Germany for a new life in the U.S.A., arriving in New York and settling in Brooklyn.

## BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

As soon as my mother got settled in Brooklyn, she grabbed the magazine cover which she had kept for three years and took a subway ride to Manhattan. She found the address she was looking for and was met by Dr. Daniel Fuchs. However, since she spoke no English, and he could not speak Polish, Russian, German, or Yiddish, very little communication took place. He noted our name and address on a 3x5 card and promised to get in touch. It was actually some six years later before he made good on his promise. During those six years, I lived in a very Jewish world in Brooklyn. The Gentile communities were also very distinct and ethnically divided with African Americans, Italians, Puerto Ricans, and other Gentiles in different directions nearby. Since the schools I went to were 99% Jewish, my contact with Gentiles or Christians was virtually nil.

After six years, the Jewish missionary organization my mother had contacted opened a new station about a mile from where we were then living. Someone in the organization searched through their files and pulled out all of the contact addresses within a certain radius of the new mission station. Workers were then dispatched to do visitation and invite us over to the new meeting place.

Before long we received a visit from Ruth Wardell, who invited us to a Jewish-Christian meeting. When I first heard the phrase "Jewish-Christian," I thought it was a complete contradiction in terms. You were either a Jew or a Christian, but not both. Anyone calling themselves a Jew and a Christian had to be schizophrenic.

Nevertheless, my curiosity was aroused and on the night of the first meeting, I decided to go. I went in and sat down. The more I listened, the angrier I became. It did not concern me that there were Jews talking about Jesus. I had expected that much. What angered me was that they were using our Bible, the Tanach, the Old Testament, to do so. I had been brought up to believe that we had our Bible and the Christians had their Bible. Their Bible was the New Testament and was about Jesus, but Jesus was not supposed to be in our Bible. Yet, here were Christians

using our Bible to talk about their Jesus, and that took a lot of nerve!

Miss Wardell could see my agitation and decided not to try reasoning with me. Instead she gave me a challenge. She gave me a New Testament and told me to take it home and see if Jesus did not do all of the things which Messiah was expected to do. I accepted the New Testament, not because I was open-minded but because I was determined to prove these schizophrenics wrong, once and for all.

At home, I began to read. The more I read of this New Testament, the more its Jewishness impressed itself upon me. This book was completely different than any of my preconceived expectations. I had been taught that it was a very Gentile book. However, the opening words stated, "The generations of Yeshua the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham." Just how much more Jewish can you get? There were rabbis, Pharisees, and Levites, holding Jewish theological debates with which I was quite familiar. Everything in the book was thoroughly Jewish and quite unlike anything I had expected. By the time I had finished reading the New Testament, I was convinced that if Yeshua was not the Messiah of Israel, then there was no such thing as a Messiah, the Reform Jews had been right all along and Orthodox Jews had been living in a dream world.

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At this point, I had reached "stage one." There are many Jews who reach this stage, convinced that Yeshua must be the Messiah but never progress beyond that. They never take the second step of accepting Him on a personal level; never allow Him to change their lives for fear of losing friends, family or job; are afraid of being thrown out into

a strange and unfamiliar Gentile world. All of these thoughts and fears were going through my mind as I went back to the mission station for a second time. This time, I was not angry anymore. I sat down with Miss Wardell, the person who had first invited me there, and together went from the Old Testament to the New Testament and back again, studying the Scriptures concerning all the teachings about Messiah. I became fully convinced, bowed my head, accepted Yeshua as my Messiah, and joined the ranks of "schizophrenics" myself.

It was at about this time that a third son was added to our family.

## CALIFORNIA

A year later, my folks moved to California, and I spent the next four years in Los Angeles, studying in a high school which was 80% Jewish. It was at this time that I experienced the truth of the words of Yeshua, recorded in Matthew's Gospel (quoting in part from Micah 7:6)...

*"Think not that I came to send peace on the earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law: and a man's foes shall be that of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that doth not take his cross and follow after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (Matthew 10:34-39 ASV).*

Throughout my time in California, my father became increasingly opposed to my messianic beliefs. He forbade me to go to any type of meetings, Jewish or otherwise. He forbade me to read the Bible, Old Testament as well as New. Finally, he stopped talking to me all together. During my whole last year of high school, not a single word passed between us. About two months before I finished high school, he sent me a message through my mother, telling me that upon my graduation I would have to leave home. This was a new crisis in my spiritual life. I had been a believer for about four years by this time and had

already had many problems at home over the issue of Yeshua, but now I was actually being put out of the house. At that time, I was reading through the letter to the Philippians and found reassurance in 4:19 which promises: "My God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in glory." When I finished high school, I had that verse and \$120 in my pocket.

### BACK TO NEW YORK

My father had requested that I not only leave his house, but leave the state of California as well; if word got around about my becoming a "Christian," it might ruin his business. So in 1962, I graduated from high school and headed back towards New York.

It took me two weeks to cross America. When I arrived, all I had spent from my own pocket was \$17. God was with me in every step of the journey: He provided a meal, a bed, a ride, or whatever the needs of the day were.

During the summer, I worked as an unpaid volunteer at a Messianic Jewish camp. By the time September arrived, virtually all of my money had been spent, leaving me with only \$20. I had been accepted at a Christian liberal arts college, but the tuition was \$2,000 (in today's currency that would be equivalent to about \$20,000) and \$20 was not going to get me very far. I decided that the best plan was to take a year off, earn as much money as I could, and then start my studies the following year. This seemed like a brilliant idea to me, but God was not too impressed. He gave me no peace about it and finally convinced me that I should start college immediately and let Him deal with the fees. In September 1962, I walked into the business office of the school, registered for my courses, and walked out with a bill for \$750 to be paid by the end of the first semester.

I remember walking down the corridor with the bill in my hand, praying, "Lord, you would not let me work a year first so you're going to have to provide this money by the time payment is due." Four months later, the first semester ended and not only had God provided the full \$750, but the college actually owed me money! It was the same story for seven out of eight semesters. Every

semester began with me owing them money, and every semester ended with the college owing me money. At the end of the eighth and final semester, it balanced out evenly to the last penny, and I graduated in 1966. My first three years were spent at Shelton College in New Jersey. My final year was at Cedarville College in Ohio.

The tuition fees were not my only financial responsibility, of course. I also needed to buy food, clothes, new textbooks every semester, and so on. I made it my policy right from the start, a policy I have kept to this day, never to make my needs publicly known, not even to close personal friends. I wanted to be sure that no one would give me money out of any kind of sympathy, but only from the prompting of the Lord. I always prayed privately, asking God for the things I needed, and He always provided. The money always came in, mostly from people whom I never met, often from people living hundreds of miles away. To this day, I have no idea how these people came to hear about a Jewish kid studying on a campus in New Jersey and later in Ohio, but God always provided.

During my college years, three sisters were born in California, but I was not permitted to see them.

Having given testimony to the truth of Matthew 10:35 about the division between a man and his father, I would also like to testify to the truth of Yeshua's promise of restoration. He said: "Verily I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or mother, or father, or children, or lands, for my sake and for the gospel's sake, but he shall receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brethren and sisters and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life" (Mark 10:29-30 ASV).

The promise of Mark 10:30 is that there will be restoration in this life for our losses for the faith. After leaving home and starting college, I was "adopted" by three other families. To this day, they call me son, and I call them Mom and Pop. By the end of my second year in college, I had three keys on my keychain. One was for a house in Levittown, Long Island; one was for a house in Washington D.C.; and a third was for a house in Wildwood,

New Jersey. I was accepted as a member of each of these families, and whenever I was in their vicinity, I was entitled to let myself into their house and make myself at home whether or not there was anyone else there. To this day, their sons and daughters call me brother, and I call them brothers and sisters. When I graduated from college, the family in Wildwood, New Jersey placed an announcement in the local newspaper which many readers must have taken as a misprint. Next to my graduation photograph was a caption which read: "Mr. and Mrs. Charles Cattell announce the graduation of their son, Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum." I can truly say that, just as Yeshua promised, fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, and houses were literally restored to me in this life.

### ISRAEL

When I graduated from college, I enrolled in a special program at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem because I had a long-standing desire to go to Israel to study. The course I enrolled in was a master's program in archaeology and historical geography. It was going to cost \$2,400. I worked all summer and saved \$800, leaving me \$1,600 short.

Ten days before I was due to board the plane to Israel, I received a letter from the United States government telling me that they had decided to give me a grant—not a loan, but a non-repayable grant—for \$1,624 which was \$24 more than I needed. There was just one condition attached to the grant: it was only valid for studying at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Naturally, I was more than happy to comply with their conditions and have kept that letter to this day. This provision enabled me to enjoy a year of study in Jerusalem and to be an eyewitness to the Six Day War of 1967, as I was living only four blocks away from the Jordanian border when the war broke out. Two months after the war, I returned to the United States and began studying at Dallas Theological Seminary where I remained for four years. After the first year at DTS, I got married.

### MARY ANN

I met my wife seven years before we were married and began courting her shortly thereafter. She was one stubborn

individual, and it took seven years before she agreed to marry me. Seven years... that meant I worked just as hard for my wife as Jacob, my forefather, worked for his wife. This fact alone worried me considerably. I was particularly concerned because my wife has two sisters!

In a Jewish wedding ceremony the marriage is sealed at the moment the bride's groom breaks a glass under his left heel. Prior to this, he can change his mind, but once the glass is broken, there is no going back. When my best man placed the glass behind my heel, I had a quick look behind Mary Ann's veil, just to make sure I was marrying the right girl, and only then did I crush the glass. Those familiar with the story of Jacob (Genesis 29:16-30) will understand why!

#### MINISTRY IN ISRAEL

A year after we were married, my wife and I felt God leading us to go back to Israel to see what ministry we could participate in. During our years of seminary, we both worked to support ourselves, and the miraculous provision which we had been experiencing stopped for that period of time. When the time came to return to Israel where we would be unable to work due to visa restrictions, we again trusted God to provide for us, and for those years He did. Thus, when the bills were due, the funds were there, again from people we have not met to this day.

For two years, we worked in Israel, at first with a very small number of Israeli believers. This angered the local "Pharisees," who put such pressure on the government that eventually we were asked to leave the country. After returning to the States in 1973, we found many young Jewish believers who needed discipleship. After working for two Messianic Jewish organizations, we finally established Ariel Ministries in 1977. To this day, the ministry is dedicated to sharing the gospel with Jewish people and the discipling of both Jewish and Gentile believers from a Messianic Jewish perspective.

To fulfill these callings, Ariel Ministries established Camp Shoshanah in the Adirondack Mountains of Upstate New York. Believers from around the world have gathered there every summer for the past 42 years to be taught the Scriptures from a Messianic Jewish per-

spective. In 2015, we opened the doors of Ariel's School of Messianic Jewish Studies, a one-year, non-accredited Bible certificate program designed to lead young men and women into a deeper understanding of God's word. Furthermore, to fulfill our calling to share the good news of Messiah with our Jewish brothers and sister, Ariel Ministries established branches all over the world whose primary goal it is to evangelize the Jewish people in their countries.

#### ABOUT ARIEL MINISTRIES

Created to evangelize and disciple our Jewish brethren, Ariel Ministries was born from necessity to meet an urgent need. Today, Ariel Ministries has plunged directly into the mainstream of Jewish missions by combining these two key areas of evangelism and discipleship, with a heavy emphasis on Bible theology and doctrine.

And today, there are thousands upon thousands of Jewish believers eager to live well-balanced lives: sharing their faith, praying, diligently studying the Word and pursuing fellowship with other believers.

That is exactly why Ariel Ministries exists.

Ariel Ministries is somewhat different from other Jewish missions in that we emphasize both evangelism and discipleship. We seek to develop a balanced program of reaching out to others, as we grow in maturity ourselves. We praise God for the existence of our other Jewish missions, realizing that He will use all who are willing to listen and obey during these last days before Messiah Jesus returns:

"Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the Lord their God and David their king, and they will come trembling to the Lord and His goodness in the last days" (Hosea 3:5).

And, so, in these "last days," the necessity and future of Jewish missions has never been greater. Yet we cannot accomplish this work ourselves. We need our brothers and sisters in the lord – Jew and Gentile alike – to join with and uphold us in this endeavor.

#### POSTSCRIPT

In the course of my travels, I took every opportunity to try and make con-

tact with the Lutheran minister who first gave my mother the Chosen People magazine cover which eventually led me to the Messiah. Several times, German believers attended the classes I was teaching and they agreed to make inquiries for me, but all wrote to say that they had no success. Eventually, I gave up and decided that until we all got to heaven, Theophil Burgstahler would never know the fruits of his labors.

In the meantime, I busied myself with teaching and writing several books, one of which was a book on biblical prophecy titled *The Footsteps of the Messiah*. Two years after it was published, it was read by a German publisher. He liked it, translated it into German, and published it in his country. Shortly afterwards, a man who knew nothing about me, but knew that his wife had an interest in prophecy, bought the book. When his wife saw the book, she recognized the name of Fruchtenbaum and wrote a letter to me. In this letter, she explained that she and her father, who was now dead, had met a family called Fruchtenbaum in a Displaced Persons camp after the end of the Second World War. As it turns out, her father was, in fact Theophil Burgstahler, the Lutheran minister for whom I had been searching. Because he had died and she was now known by her married name, I had failed to find her.

The next year, my wife and I stopped over in Germany on our way home from Israel in order to meet her. It was then that she told me that she had been praying for my salvation every single day since we left Germany in 1951. I was saved in 1957, but she never knew. She had continued praying for me every day all the way through to the 1980s when she finally found out that I had, indeed, become a believer—truly a testimony to the power of prevailing prayer. Hanna and her husband Manfred Künstler began Ariel Germany and served as Ariel representatives to the German-speaking world until they retired. Ariel Germany has continued to function unto this day.

In closing, I would like to explain that like me, you too can find peace in life through peace with God. Here's how:

1. Realize God's plan.

Real life has its source in God.

"You will show me the path of life: in Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (Psalm 16:11).

2. Acknowledge man's problem.

Man has separated himself from God.

"...your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you..." (Isaiah 59:2).

3. Recognize God's remedy.

God has given us the one perfect sacrifice for sin through His Messiah, the Anointed One of Israel.

"But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5).

4. Respond by receiving the gift of eternal life.

Receiving the Messiah Yeshua (Jesus) involves a moral decision to turn to God's way and from your own, to trust Messiah Yeshua to forgive your sins and bring you into a right relationship with God.

"But as many as received Him, to them gave he the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on His name..." (John 1:12).

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

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END NOTE

1. For the complete story of the Fruchtenbaum family, see David Turner, *When Your Face Was Your Destiny* (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2014).

# A Race of His Choosing



Tim Ross

*Tim Ross is Associate Pastor at Nevins Lake Church in Stanton, MI where his father Dennis serves as Senior Pastor. He is a graduate of The Master's Seminary and both father and son are members of IFCA International.*

**M**y mom was, by her own admission, a very shy girl. So when—on her first day on campus at the Grand Rapids School of Bible and Music in Grand Rapids, MI—her one friend and companion flitted off to join another group of students, Carolyn's worst fears were quickly realized: she was alone. Spotting a low brick wall, she walked over and sat down. Not long after a young man sat down beside her. He was, as she recalls, "quite a talker," which was nice, because Carolyn didn't have much to say. At some point, he kicked off one of the shoes dangling from her toes, sending it spiraling across the walkway. After retrieving the shoe, he held it captive in his hands, teasing Carolyn about never being able to leave him. And she never did. Shortly after graduation, Dennis and Carolyn Ross married at Carolyn's home church—Ross Bible Church—in Port Huron, Michigan.

They settled down near Grand Rapids, Michigan, and plunged into ministry at their new home church, Whitneyville Bible Church (Alto, MI). They took on leadership of the youth group right away, and later served as Sunday School teachers and Awana leaders. It was a great beginning. When the children started coming four and half years later, their joy only grew. Says Carolyn, "I had it all. Our life was pretty much perfect. That's how I would describe our life." She was married to a Christian, God fearing husband, deeply involved in church life, and the mother of three beautiful children, the youngest a girl.

## A FIGHTER IS BORN

Shortly after my birth, God blessed my parents with a second son—Tyler David. He was wiry and blonde, much like his brother. Strangers often mistook the young boys for twins. However, as the boys grew and developed, subtle differences began to appear. By the time the boys were old enough (6 & 7) to play together on their first tee ball team, others had begun to notice

too. Tyler was having trouble keeping his balance. After making contact with the ball, he would stumble his way to first base. People began asking if Tyler was okay. At first my parents resisted acknowledging Tyler's symptoms. "I remember making a lot of excuses," remembers Carolyn. "It's the last thing you want to know as a mother, that something's wrong with your child."

*"When I found that out, my world crashed," says Carolyn. "My perfect world, up to that point...it crashed...I couldn't understand how this could happen to me...everything was going my way...I had good, solid, godly plans and I was serving."*

But something was wrong. At the prompting of Tyler's kindergarten teacher, my parents took him to see a neurologist. The results were slow in coming. After two years of painful testing, Tyler was diagnosed with Friedreich's Ataxia, a rare, progressive disease affecting the central nervous system. This disease, my parents learned, would slowly rob Tyler of all his mobility and all his physical functions—only his mind would be left intact. He was not expected to live past his 21st birthday. My parents' perfect life was shattered. "When I found that out, my world crashed," says Carolyn. "My perfect world, up to that point...it crashed...I couldn't understand how this could happen to me...everything was going my way...I had good, solid, godly plans and I was serving." Carolyn wrestled with Tyler's diagnosis for two years. So did Dennis.

## FAMILY HUDDLE

Tyler's diagnosis had revealed something just as troubling as his ailments: the superficiality of our family's faith. "I found out that I had a very



The Ross Family, with Tyler in the front and in the back (L to R): Kendra, Carolyn, Dennis and Tim.

shallow faith,” says Carolyn, “because I didn’t really need God. I mean...I thought I did. I thought I had a lot of understanding of His Word and His promises. But when that happened, I realized I really didn’t and my faith was very shallow.” Dennis too felt his own faith being tested. “I was so broken and spiritually unprepared for what I was facing,” remembers Dennis. “God used that experience to reveal to me the quality of my faith, the shallowness of my relationship with Him. I didn’t grow up in a Christian home, and I was shocked to discover that I had settled for mere religion, the type of Christianity that I didn’t have much respect for. I was doing all the right things: I was faithful to my wife, providing for my family, attending and faithfully serving at church. I was even on the church Board and teaching a high school Sunday School class. By all outward appearances I had everything together, but at a time of personal crisis I found out that I didn’t.”

Yet Tyler quickly came to terms with God’s plan for his life. When he was diagnosed at age 8, Carolyn remembers talking with him about the disease and how it would progress: “He was concerned and a little scared, so I held him tight and told him his family would always support him and help him

through this. Even at that young age he was calm and content and so happy.” Tyler’s attitude never wavered, even as other children his age were growing and developing and he slowly began losing the physical abilities he once had.

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Tyler’s attitude was infectious. “The amazing part was that Tyler had this great attitude the whole time, better than us,” says Carolyn. “That helped [us] a lot. [Tyler] was just happy with how he was and happy with how God made him, and he didn’t even seem to struggle. I never saw any anger from him.” God used Tyler’s simple trust and acceptance to encourage our family. As time progressed, God taught us to trust as Tyler had. After two years of wrestling with Tyler’s diagnosis, my mom and dad released their son to the care of His Creator: “Finally my faith and my love for God matured enough where I could actually accept Tyler’s disability,” says

Carolyn. “I just had to place Tyler in my hands and just trust that God would help us through this whole process.” Adds Dennis, “It was very humbling to have to admit to myself, to God, and to others the type of Christian that I had become, [but] God used that experience to change me, to cause me to get serious and to quit going through the motions.” Soon all three of us children were taking cues from our parents.

Something else happened during this time: we all grew closer together as a family. An unbreakable bond formed at that first family meeting when my mom and dad shared the news of Tyler’s condition. And this bond continued to grow. Because of the progressive nature of Tyler’s disease, he was always dealing with what my parents termed, “new realities.” As Tyler’s disease made further inroads into his life, Tyler, along with all of us, had to adjust accordingly. We mourned each loss, and as we each individually trusted God for guidance and hope, we all grew closer together. God had become our center—every move toward Him was a move toward one another.

#### **TIMMY AND TYLER**

The bond between us brothers was especially strong. But as we aged, the differences between us became more pro-

nounced. As we finished middle school, and I began to show great potential as a runner, Tyler was still adjusting to his newest new reality: life in a wheelchair. It was about this time I overheard my dad describing our family to a stranger: "I have one boy that can run like the wind, and I have one boy that can barely walk," his voice full of emotion.

Tyler and I shared a set of bunkbeds until I left for college, and at night we often talked after our parents sent us to bed. One night, when we were both in high school, I asked Tyler what sport he would have played had he been able. After a brief silence, Tyler responded, "I would have been a runner. A much better runner than you." Tyler never lacked for confidence! And I don't doubt him. He had a runner's build but, more importantly, he possessed a runner's spirit. When we wrestled as boys it was difficult to pin him to the ground. I don't remember him ever pinning me, but I do remember struggling to pin him. Tyler was a fighter. He couldn't win, but he could fight. And fight he did.

Tyler was a fixture at my cross country and track and field meets throughout middle and high school. Our family traveled together, supporting each other whenever possible. At track meets I could see him sitting next to the track, just outside the fence, baseball cap pulled close over his eyes to block out the sun. Tyler inspired me, but I never ran for Tyler. He had his own race to run. Rather, it was as if Tyler ran with me, his example challenging me to compete with the same devotion and determination he displayed every day. And should I be tempted to boast of my accomplishments, I needed only a minivan ride home with Tyler to remind me that it is God who makes man mute or deaf, or seeing or blind (Exodus 4:11). God had given me a gift. Through Tyler I was also to learn that God had given me a stewardship, a responsibility to run my race to the fullest.

#### WAITING ON A WHEELCHAIR

Tyler lost the ability to walk in 8th grade, but not without a fight. He walked the halls of our middle school as long as he was able, and then, for a time, even when he wasn't. I recall getting pretty frustrated at one point, complain-

ing to my dad about how long it was taking Tyler to get to class and about how bad he had gotten. I was convinced it was time for Tyler to use a wheelchair. I'll never forget what happened next. My dad paused, inhaled deeply, then slowly released the gulp of air. His shoulders sagged toward the pavement and his jaw tightened, then slackened. For a moment there was silence. Finally, he spoke, "Don't you understand? When Tyler gets in that wheelchair, he's never getting out." In that moment I finally understood what was really at stake: it wasn't convenience, or even my brother's safety. It was his spirit. The wheelchair was inevitable, but it was important that Tyler fight it off as long as possible. More than anything, my dad feared quenching his resolve.

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For a boy who liked to go fast, Tyler's disability required a fair amount of patience. Our family didn't do anything quickly. We did, however, do it together. Yet on rare occasions Tyler's wheelchair had its perks. There were two special trips to see the Detroit Tigers—taking in batting practice from the grass around home plate, talking with players between reps in the batting cage, loads of autographs and, of course, the bat that Magglio Ordonez personally delivered to Tyler. After smashing a few balls around Comerica Park, Magglio discovered a crack in his bat and kindly offered it to Tyler. It was a fitting gift. The bat had been given a new purpose. No longer would it accompany Magglio in the day's starting line-up. Instead, it would accompany a young, ecstatic, wheelchair-bound boy back to his seat. I don't think any bat ever served so fine a purpose.

#### OFF TO COLLEGE

Tyler's dream was to go to Cornerstone University in Grand Rapids and live on campus, but my parents were fearful. The questions far outnumbered the answers: How would Tyler get ready? How would he study? Who would help him take tests? Would there be a room that fit his needs? What if he hurt himself and no one was around to help him? How would we afford it? What if his condition began to worsen more rapidly? Tyler was undaunted. In the end, my parents granted his request, my dad penning the following words during the process: "My son wants to fly, / with two broken wings. / I fear his fall, / but he won't stay in the nest. / If I force him to stay, / his spirit will be crushed. / If I let him make the leap, / his body might be crushed. / What's worse, a broken spirit / or a broken body? / I hope the safety net holds." Facing an impossible choice, my parents released Tyler to chase his dream, trusting that God would once again care for their son.

The safety net held. It was the best four years of Tyler's life—the only years he would spend away from home. He wasn't completely independent but, with a little help, he was able to live a life somewhat similar to others his age. A caregiver helped Tyler get ready each morning, and Cornerstone made special modifications to his room to accommodate his needs. He lived in that room—in the freshman dorm—all four years, affectionately referring to himself as "the father of VO," the oldest student in Van Osdel Hall. Everything at school was a challenge for Tyler. Simple things, like doing homework, took hours to complete. He took all his class notes mentally. He took all his tests orally. I don't know how he studied. Yet he earned a business degree, graduating with honors in 2008.

Throughout his time at CU, Tyler never once used the motorized wheelchair that had been provided for him; it represented another progression in his disease. Instead, he preferred to "hitch rides" around campus on his manual wheelchair. When I asked him what happened if the person pushing him to class was running late, he just smiled and shrugged his shoulders. By relying on others to get around campus, Tyler helped his classmates understand how

to interact with someone with special needs. His insistence on using a manual chair encouraged others to come to his aid, creating opportunities for interaction that may not have otherwise occurred. Of course Tyler benefitted too. He was never far from a friend, new or old. And it never seemed to bother Tyler that it was almost always girls pushing him around campus. Tyler's social life blossomed at Cornerstone. He was out of the nest and soaring like never before.

#### **BLINDSIDED**

Of all Tyler's friends at Cornerstone, none were closer than his sister Kendra. An accomplished runner herself, Kendra attended Cornerstone on a joint athletic/academic scholarship, joining Tyler his Junior and Senior years. However, unlike Tyler, she didn't want to live on campus. She loved living at home, choosing instead to make the 20-minute commute each morning with her friend and cross country and track and field teammate, Katey Kingsbury. Katey, a native of Michigan's Upper Peninsula, rented a room in our basement during Kendra's sophomore year. Life was great. Tyler was thriving, Kendra and Katey were living at home, and I had just returned from the University of Missouri, having graduating in the Spring of 2007. After 5 years of separation, our family was finally reunited. The next 8 months would include some of the happiest days of our lives.

But everything changed on Wednesday morning, January 23, 2008. Two miles from home, Kendra hit a patch of black ice, slid across the center-line, and crashed into oncoming traffic. She died instantly. Kendra was 19 years old. Her teammate Katey sustained life threatening injuries, but was eventually able to make a full recovery. We were blindsided. All our energy and concern for years was directed toward Tyler, thinking we were going to lose him. Says Carolyn, "I could have never imagined what happened to our family...the shock that I felt I cannot describe. It never crossed my mind that I could lose my precious daughter Kendra. All of our focus was always on Tyler. His physical needs and illness. And it never entered my mind that I could lose one of my other children. It was just unbelievable

to me...I felt sick; I felt faint; it was just as if the life was draining right out of me...my heart was broken."

But God had prepared our family for this moment. Beginning with Tyler's diagnosis 15 years earlier, He had been working in our lives, steadily refining our faith and steeling our resolve. When the Sheriff's deputy met my dad and informed him of Kendra's death, he responded: "The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21). Says Dennis, "What took me about two years to accept with Tyler took about two seconds with Kendra." By the grace of God, my mom was able to respond in a similar fashion. Surrounded by the flood of family and friends that filled our home the afternoon after the accident, she closed her eyes and found refuge in the loving arms of her Lord and Savior: "[In that moment] I knew that God was with me. He was surrounding me with His love, and He was comforting me."

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about heaven.*

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Still, Kendra's loss weighed heavily on our hearts. My mom cried herself to sleep for six months. Part of a music group, she found herself unable to sing, her voice locked beneath the lump in her throat. During the following year I often woke up early in the morning to find my dad sobbing silently in the living room chair. My brother was devastated. Part of Tyler's world died with Kendra. No longer would Kendra's friends descend upon our home, leaving Tyler more isolated and lonely than ever. At times I felt overwhelmed with sadness. Unsure how to cope, I often became bitter towards family and friends.

But the sorrow was different this time. There were no more questions about God's sovereignty. No doubts about His love and care for our family. Nobody was angry with God for what He allowed to happen. The unpreparedness we'd experienced at Tyler's diagnosis had been replaced with a dependent trust, a quiet resolve to

embrace God's purpose for our lives. Looking back, we can see how God was preparing us for Kendra's death. In the months leading up to her accident, my dad was busy preparing and teaching an adult Sunday School class entitled, "What Does the Bible Say About Heaven?" In the kindness of God, the last sermon Kendra heard my dad preach was a message about heaven. My dad often wonders if Kendra will greet him in heaven with the following words: 'Hey Rev, you got a couple of things right, but let me tell you about what you missed.'

#### **A SHOOTING STAR**

Kendra maximized her time on earth. She was spunky and outgoing; a talented runner and an aspiring artist. She was restless, cramming as much as she could into each day. My dad called our house Kendra's "home base," as she was never there for very long. A quick check-in, a bite to eat, maybe a change of clothes (or "costume change" as my dad liked to call it), and she was gone, back out the door again. And she was beautiful. Even in her "rat suit," wearing sweatpants and a hoodie, her hair pulled back and make-up free, Kendra possessed a rare inward beauty that eclipsed anything external. Of all the beautiful girls at Caledonia High School, we believe that Kendra was selected homecoming queen because her classmates knew how much she cared for them. Kendra loved people, and she felt compelled to try and solve everyone's problems.

A week before her accident, Kendra and my mom had one of their many "sit downs" to talk about life. Kendra was in her second year at Cornerstone University and cramming so much into each day. She had recently reconnected with her high school track team, was discipling a friend, working as a waitress, volunteering in Awana and Young Life, babysitting for MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers), and participating in numerous Bible studies. There just weren't enough hours in the day to do everything. Something had to go. Kendra knew this, so two months earlier she had removed herself from the Cornerstone Track Team, effectively ending her career as a runner and forfeiting her athletic scholarship. At the time, my mom was concerned. She remembers telling Kendra that these other respon-

sibilities could wait, that "she had her whole life to do all these things." Kendra was undeterred. She told her mom that it was a "spiritual decision," and that she knew her parents wouldn't understand. She felt compelled to connect with these people, consumed with a sense of urgency for those God had brought into her life. She had what runners sometimes call "a nose for the finish line," an innate sense that the end is near, that the critical moment is upon them. "Forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead," Kendra "press[ed] on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus," her light burning brightest just before the end (Philippians 3:13-14). What was a surprise to us—Kendra's sudden home going—was known all along by God (Psalm 139:16). After Kendra's death, we slowly began to understand why Kendra seemed to have to have such a busy schedule; she had 19 years to live a lifetime.

Kendra's maturity and faith were way beyond anyone we knew at that age. Having trusted Jesus for salvation as a child, Kendra's faith grew rapidly as a teenager. At a time when many others her age were pushing the limits, Kendra was pursuing the lost. After Kendra's death, I read through many of her journals. And what I read blew me away. Page after page revealed a young woman consumed with the desire to share her faith with those around her. Of special interest to her were those who were hurting or who had been excluded, those one might call "outsiders." One particular journal entry caught my attention. It was dated the summer before, during the three weeks she volunteered as a counselor in Minnesota at a Young Life Camp. Those weeks were filled with entries recording the devotions she shared each day with the girls in her cabin. One Thursday morning entry bore the title, "Hanging Out with Nobodies!" Kendra recorded how she spoke to the girls from a passage in Luke chapter 15 about a sheep that was lost and the shepherd who ran after it: "What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? (v. 4). She encouraged the girls to see the people of

this world through God's eyes, and to run after the lost in this world. Kendra cherished the love that God has for every person on earth, and was acutely aware of His desire to have a personal relationship with each one of us, no matter who we are.

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Tyler's life and Kendra's death taught us to look out, not in. Their lives opened our eyes to the countless struggles and sorrows of so many around us. At Kendra's funeral, my mom and dad prepared a brief statement for me to read on their behalf. It began, "Many people die every day—unloved, unknown and in relative obscurity, forgotten. Carolyn and I have been overwhelmed by the kindness, generosity, presence, and comfort of so many. It is a reminder to us to show the love of Christ to others as we have so richly received it." In their most intense moment of grief, my parents' thoughts were drawn to those who, unlike their daughter, spend their final moments alone, forgotten by the world around them. God had given them a new purpose: "to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (2 Corinthians 1:4). The once shy Carolyn now found herself sharing her story of God's comfort with countless women, speaking at Mother/Daughter banquets and round-table discussions. My dad experienced a profound connection with those grieving in his flock.

Kendra's death also turned our attention heavenward. "Heaven had become so real to us," remembers Carolyn. My dad taped the following statement above the desk in his office: "One day closer to home." It remains there to this day. The month before Kendra's death, I had been accepted to The Master's Seminary in Sun Valley, California. Now I wondered if I should go. I wanted to be near my parents, and I knew they wanted me near them. But they encouraged me to go. They had long since released Tyler, and Kendra had made it home safely to

her heavenly Father. The time had come to let Tim go.

### **ANOTHER FINISH LINE**

After graduating from Cornerstone, Tyler moved home. Then shortly after that, he, along with our parents, moved 55 miles north to Stanton, Michigan, where Dennis had been called to pastor Nevins Lake Church. My mom became Tyler's full-time care giver. During the next six years, Tyler's health continued its slow descent. But Tyler had a remarkable ability to lighten up the bleakest moments with humor. He would make some off the-wall-comment, distracting everyone through laughter. His body was scarred and permanently fixed in an odd shape because of the vertebrae that had been fused together. His eyes darted back and forth in their sockets and his saliva pooled at the back of his throat, impatiently waiting the next swallow. His enlarged heart worked overtime while he sat idly in his chair, and his rarely used shrieved up and curled out.

But as Tyler's physical health continued to decline, his spiritual health steadily improved. Saved as a young man, he grew especially close to Christ during the last few years of his life. He had a daily schedule which included listening to the Bible and at least two sermon podcasts. The more physical abilities Tyler lost, the more time and energy he devoted to God and His Word. We could see his relationship deepen with the preachers he asked my mom to add, as well as those he asked to delete. Tyler loved his church, Nevins Lake, and despaired of missing a Sunday morning service. His church family showered him with love, making him feel so special.

Tyler was released from his body on August 12, 2015, crossing the finish line surrounded by his family. "When Tyler died, I was so happy for him," says Dennis, "though I knew his mom and I would always grieve for him." Shortly before his death, Tyler told his mom, "I had so much potential. I could have done so much more for God." But he had already done so much. Having run the race before him, God used Tyler to shape and mold our entire family. Through Tyler, God broke us. And through Tyler, God built us

up, one “new reality” at a time. Both Tyler and Kendra have opened our eyes to our potential as servants for Christ. They have opened our eyes to the race before us and fixed our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2).

**EDITOR'S POSTSCRIPT** *Many readers will want to know a bit more about the author. Tim Ross became a five-time Michigan State Champion runner (one time in Cross Country and four times in track). He was a 1st Team Cross Country High School All-American and ten times was named All-Big 12 at the University of Missouri. He is married to Julia and they have three beautiful children who bring their parents and grandparents great joy. Tim may be reached at [tim11ross@gmail.com](mailto:tim11ross@gmail.com)*

# How the Lord Jesus Christ Saved Me



Joe O'Neill

Pastor Joe O'Neill is a long-time member of IFCA International and serves as pastor of Mt. Hope Bible Church in Grass Lake, MI. He also is a member of the IFCA Communications / Publications Committee. He may be reached at [josephoneill@mthopebible.org](mailto:josephoneill@mthopebible.org)

**W**hen God does a mighty work to change our lives, the normal reaction is to tell others about it. In fact the Bible says, "Let the redeemed of the LORD say so" (Psalm 107:2). In this article, I want to tell you what the Lord has done for me.

My story begins in Jackson, Michigan, where I was born the fifth of six children. We were a normal, middle-class, Roman Catholic family. My parents sent us to a parochial school through the eighth grade, which was not only a solid education, but also a positive experience.

I grew up believing deeply in God. I knew that God was good and I knew He wanted me to be a nice person and treat others right. I was convinced from a young age that the best life is to honor Him. Our family went to church every Sunday and gave thanks to God at meals. But that doesn't mean we were without problems. Remember, we were a normal family, and normal families have problems. My own heart was anxious and my spirit restless as I tried to find my place in this world.

In Junior High I started to consider the idea of becoming a Catholic priest. My favorite uncle was a priest. He was talented, good with people, friendly, could sing, enjoyed sports, and was fun to spend time with. I began thinking that perhaps God wanted me to become a priest when I grew up.

In addition to attending regular church services, I began attending a Charismatic Catholic service on Sunday nights. I certainly enjoyed the upbeat singing and guitar accompaniment, the testimonies, the people, and the more informal atmosphere. The people who attended the service really seemed to want to be there.

One night at the Charismatic service, a leader gave a bold invitation. He said that if anyone in the audience wanted to put their faith in Christ, they should come to the middle of the auditorium (where the leaders were). I was thinking about it, but was hesitant, wondering what others might think if I went forward. Then I saw a nun leave

her seat and start for the middle. I thought to myself, "If a nun needs to put her faith in Christ, then I certainly need to as well!"

I went forward and one of the leaders guided me in a prayer to receive Christ. I repeated all the words. I meant it with all my heart. But, I didn't experience true conversion by the power of the Holy Spirit. Looking back now (some thirty-three years later), I understand that I didn't truly put my faith in Jesus Christ alone to save me at that meeting. I was just performing another religious task in order to be right with God. At that time my real faith was in my ability to please God by doing good works. I thought that if I did enough good things, God would see my heart and be pleased.

*In Junior High I started to consider the idea of becoming a Catholic priest. My favorite uncle was a priest. He was talented, and fun to spend time with.*

I was involved with Fellowship of Christian Athletes at the public High School. One of the Math teachers started the group and would talk to us about faith in Christ and the importance of reading the Bible. The emphasis on Scripture was certainly helpful.

After graduating from High School, I went to Canisius College in Buffalo, New York, a college associated with the Society of Jesus (or Jesuits). I majored in Religious Studies with the idea of perhaps pursuing the priesthood. I enjoyed learning about the Bible, non-Christian religions and philosophy. But my, how confusing it all was. Some of the professors didn't really believe the Bible. One in particular, a Jesuit priest, said he didn't believe that Jesus Christ rose bodily from the grave. The priest told the class that Jesus didn't physically come back from

the dead, but arose only in the hearts of His followers. I was shocked when I heard that because the resurrection of Christ was what I had always been taught. But, I stayed in school because I figured the priest was much more intelligent than I was.

The more I learned from the professors and the books during college, the less I believed the Bible and the more confused I became. My head was spinning! Who was right? Is Christianity the truth or just one of many truths? Was the Bible to be believed literally or had it been edited by several generations? Did Jesus and Buddha basically teach the same thing, but were just interpreted differently by their audiences? Is God personal or impersonal? Is the devil a real person or just the personification of evil forces? These and other issues flooded my mind and I was wondering who could teach me and help me sort them out.

During my Junior year in college, I learned there was a conservative element of Catholicism that despised the liberal bent of universities and seminaries. These people attempt to stay true to the traditions and doctrine of Roman Catholicism. They greatly honor Mary, the mother of Christ, supposing that honoring Mary brings glory to God. I remember praying the rosary (a series of prayers to God and Mary) three times a day. I also remember traveling to a church to see the supposed face of Christ on a curtain in the church. I didn't see it at first, but after awhile I could make out the outline of a face. Though interesting, none of these traditional experiences brought true relief to my soul.

During my last semester of college, I met the girl of my dreams. Elaine didn't have all the answers, but when I was with her I thought that God must indeed be good. My relationship with her ended my interest in the priesthood and we were soon married and began a family. But the question remained: what can I hold on to that is truly true?

One day my brother Ed and his wife Anne visited Elaine and me and told us that we needed to be saved. I asked them to explain to me what "saved" meant. They didn't give me a very convincing answer, but they told me that if I put my trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior,

I could have a right relationship with God. A few days later, my brother sent me an article by evangelist Luis Palau that was all about the cross of Christ. Palau stated that on the cross the Lord Jesus Christ took the sin of the whole world on Himself and died for our sin as our substitute. Christ did this so that whoever believed in Him would be forgiven, no matter how great their sin. I read the article over several times. It made me want to read the Bible again for understanding.

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As I read the Bible again, I came across a verse that struck a nerve. I think it will strike a nerve with you too if you think about it. Ephesians 2:3 says that without Christ we are "by nature children of wrath." This means that we are born in so sinful a state that unless we get a new nature, our fallen nature (i.e. our natural self) will keep us under God's wrath (i.e. His anger) forever.

When I considered Ephesians 2:3, I could see that it was contrary to what I had learned in college and in church. In those places they didn't talk about God's wrath. They told me that people are basically good and if we love our neighbor, then God will accept us into heaven. I had not been educated about God's wrath, and thinking about this concept made me fear for the first time that I might not qualify for heaven.

I sure didn't want to spend eternity in hell apart from God, so my search for truth became even more intense. I wanted to know what was really true. I decided to go without food and seek out the truth. Little did I know that the Truth was actually seeking me.

On November 16, 1981, I was watching a Christian television program. The preacher said clearly that a person could not get to heaven on his own, or by his own power. Then he explained that Jesus came to earth to die for our sin and rise again from the grave because without Him we could never get to heaven. In other words, because we could never get to heaven on our own, God mercifully made a way for us through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Now that made sense to me! All my life I had been trying to get to heaven by my own goodness and my own ability and I had failed miserably.

I remember getting on my knees in the kitchen of our apartment and asking the Lord if it was all true. My heart knew right away that it was true and I believed in the Lord Jesus Christ as my Savior and was truly saved. That night I was born again. I received a new nature from the Lord because His Spirit entered my heart. I was no longer a child of wrath, but rather a son of God through faith in Christ.

Later that night I told my wife that I was born again. She had no idea what I meant and looked at me like I had three heads. She was concerned that my being "born again" would hurt our marriage. By God's grace, Elaine was also saved through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ about ten months later (that is a story all by itself). And our marriage has been blessed by the Lord. Six children and one grandchild later she is still the woman of my dreams.

I wish that I could say that I have perfectly followed the Lord since that day when He revealed Himself to me, but I would be a liar if I did. I can honestly say that God rewards those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). And I can say that the Bible is entirely true (John 17:17), and that Jesus is entirely true (John 14:6). You, too, can be saved through faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ alone (Acts 16:31). He can do for you what He has done for me.

# From Fake to Real



Susan Duncan

*Susan Duncan is a graduate of Mid-South Bible College in Memphis and wife of IFCA pastor Larry Duncan. Larry is pastor of Jeffersontown (KY) Bible Church and has served two terms on the IFCA International Board of Directors.*

**I**n 1 Samuel 16:7 it states, “For the LORD sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.” No matter how good one looks, God sees the heart. Sometimes the person seen is not who the person really is. It is easy to see that a bad person needs the LORD. What about a good person – someone brought up in a Christian home, married to a pastor, involved in ministry?

Growing up as an IFCA preacher’s kid, I am told I went forward in a church service when I was five years old. Because I only had vague memories of this, during my growing up years I had many doubts about my salvation. I made this decision many times during those years, in case I hadn’t done it right previous times.

During my teen years I looked good at church, but had no desire to live for Christ. I did not want to be different from my peers, but wanted to be like everybody else, namely my unsaved friends. At church or around church people, I acted one way; I acted totally different around my friends or non-church people. While not rebelling outwardly, I did things behind my parents’ backs – lying, stealing, and being deceitful. I was a fake. Eventually what was in my heart did come out.

After high school I attended Bible college. At this point in my life, I did think I was saved but there were red flags along the way. In Personal Evangelism class, I had a hard time writing and presenting my testimony. Also, a teacher confronted me about plagiarism, saying in essence that she did not think I was the person everyone thought I was. On a break while visiting home, I lost my temper with my sister and threw a large fork across the room at her. Thankfully, I missed.

It was at Bible college where I met Larry, my future husband, who was preparing to be a pastor. I figured since I grew up in a pastor’s home, it would not be a problem to marry a pastor.

We married. On our honeymoon one of those red flags surfaced...anger! We went camping (something I would not personally recommend unless you are truly a camper). I had

camped with my family growing up, but that is totally different from camping as an adult when you are one of the responsible ones. I didn’t have a clue. When I could not keep the fire under a camp stove going, I got very angry. My husband later told me he was very surprised at my temper. He had not seen it up to that point.

We settled in as pastor and wife, and I did a pretty good job of looking good. But at home I was a very selfish person and hard to live with. My bouts of anger increased as our family increased and life got busier. It did not take much to set me off: muddy floor, interruptions to my schedule, fussing kids, homeschooling stresses, even accidental messes.

*I was very much clean on the outside and dirty on the inside. The person I was at home did not match who I was in public.*

Anger is a sin that can be hidden from most anyone, EXCEPT one’s family. Proverbs 21:9 states it is “better to dwell in a corner of a house-top than in a house with a contentious and angry woman.” How true! My good husband and children were the recipients of that anger – anger that I could control in front of other people, but chose not to when dealing with my family. In the middle of yelling at the children, I would totally change my tone of voice and be pleasant and calm when the phone rang. In short, I was a hypocrite, a fake. I was very much like the scribes and Pharisees Jesus rebuked: clean on the outside, but on the inside “full of robbery and self-indulgence” (Matthew 23:25). I was very much clean on the outside and dirty on the inside. The person I was at home did not match who I was in public.

The LORD blessed me with a wonderful husband. All through those years, he was patient and loving and never returned the anger. A few years ago, I found out just how hard it was for

him. Together we wrote up my story for Unshackled, a radio ministry of Pacific Garden Mission in Chicago. (If you are interested, you can go to the archives on their website and listen to my story from January 2007.) At one point, and I remember it quite well, Larry started calling me “good wife.” I had not known why; I probably never asked him. He told the LORD that maybe if he called me “good wife,” it would start to come true. He had to ask the LORD to help him continue to love me, as I was not always very lovely. And I know he prayed for me.

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God has a way of heating things up to bring out what is in the heart. God used my anger to bring me to the end of myself. When our son was in his teen years, he rebelled against us and God. It was a very stressful time in our family, and in our marriage. Also about this time my husband decided to stop giving in to my unreasonableness. Boy, did that cause more conflict! Because of my anger, I was seriously questioning my salvation. I looked to Larry for that assurance, but he gave none. Rather, he encouraged me to read and study 1 John for myself. I tried but it just did not make sense to me. I read a book on controlling anger. The book suggested ten steps to follow when you feel yourself getting angry. I could not make it through the ten steps; I couldn't even remember the steps when I needed them.

During this time, I reached out to a believer-friend and told her that I had a really bad anger problem. She could not believe that was true, knowing me as she did – or thought she did – and assured me that everyone gets angry from time to time, and that was perfectly normal. In retrospect, it is not wise to just dismiss anger issues in a person's life. Uncontrollable fits of anger are not normal; they are sin.

I was miserable. I told God that He had to do something. I could not keep going like I was. I KNEW that my anger could and would destroy our family. I had wondered for a long time how I could possibly be saved and still have such a horrible temper. At the age of forty, having spent fourteen of those years looking the part of a good pastor's wife – sitting on the front row, playing the instruments, singing, teaching kids' classes – God did something!

God is very gracious, is He not? While my husband attended Board meetings at an IFCA convention, I read a book a friend had given me, searching every Scripture it mentioned. As I read, the truth of God's Word pierced my heart. For the first time, from Romans I finally understood that I was a sinner and MY sin offended a Holy God. I had never really come to grips with that.

God used my anger, something I could not excuse and yet could not control either, to impress upon me the weight and guilt of sin; I was broken before God. I acknowledged my sin, repented, and truly trusted Jesus Christ as my Savior. I realized nothing I had ever done, even praying prayers and making decisions, had accomplished my salvation. Jesus Christ had done all that was necessary for my salvation when He died for me. I knew then that because of Christ, I was forgiven and accepted by God. What a relief! And what joy!

Did things change? Yes, things were and are different. God consistently worked to remove the outbursts of anger. My fear of death was gone; that hope is secure in Jesus Christ. There is a consistent desire to know God better and to please Him above pleasing others. Am I perfect now? No, but God is changing me and I am growing.

I am very grateful God saw through that good pastor's wife on the front row and brought me to Himself. He can and does turn the fake into real.

Ephesians 2 sums this up: “But GOD, ... because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ ... For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”

## *We Welcome these Men & Organization to our Fellowship*

### **Individuals**

Rev. Steve C. DeGroot  
Decatur, MI

Mr. John D. Younkers  
Lincoln, CA

### **Organization**

Shepherds  
Theological Seminary  
6051 Tryon Rd  
Cary, NC

# Tragedy or Triumph? A True Story



David Wisniewski

Pastor Fred Goebert of Factoryville Bible Church, Athens, MI has written this account about a totally transforming incident in the life of David Wisniewski, a Deacon at Factoryville Bible Church.

**O**n a gorgeous Sunday in October, David Kaniewski prepared to harvest the corn. David and his family farmed 200 acres. Working alone, David was not anticipating the tragedy ahead. The oil can fell as he began to oil the chain. With the picker running, he reached to retrieve the fallen can. Suddenly, David's right leg slipped from its position. The gathering chain grasped his pant leg and began to pull it into the machine.

Instinctively David threw his hands forward to brace himself, only to have both arms pulled into the snapping rolls. His arms and leg were not only trapped, but were being pulled further and further into the picker. David's first impulse was to cry out to God for help. Because of the machine's inability to complete its cycle, the tractor stalled, shutting down the intake of the corn picker. There was silence and no conceivable way to get out of this dilemma. David never lost consciousness, as his mind raced to find a solution. His first fear was bleeding to death.

David was two miles from his home and nearly one-half mile through the woods from his brother's home. The chances of his brother hearing him were remote. A slight breeze muffled his calls for help. Seeming like an eternity, a slow agonizing hour crept by as he wondered when someone would miss him and come looking. Another hour passed and still no one came.

David's wife, Pat, enjoyed a personal relationship with Jesus Christ that David did not understand, nor seek to understand. They had been married almost 40 years. Pat had been praying for David's salvation for a long time.

David began to cry out to God...not once, or twice, but over and over again. "If you get me out of this...I will belong to you forever." With each passing moment his prayer became more fervent and sincere. God in His mercy and grace did not allow David to lose consciousness. These hours become precious and valuable moments with God.

Finally after three hours of calling out, David's brother Dennis and his son-in-law heard

his cries for help. David had never been so glad to see anyone in his life. Although they could give comfort and assurance, there was no possibility of freeing David from his captor. Release would not occur for nearly two more hours. The "jaws-of-life" were necessary to cut David free from his tormentor. By this time there was no feeling left in his arms and leg.

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God had long been at work. Thirty years of prayers were coming to fruition. Pat's church was notified of the accident. The service was stopped while corporate prayer was made for David and Pat. Many in the congregation continued to pray as the night progressed. David's injuries were severe and limb threatening. There was a high possibility of losing his left arm, and serious infection was always a possibility.

Pat waited at the hospital with her son Todd, her pastor, and close family and friends. While everyone prayed for God to work in David's heart, God was actively pursuing Todd. Todd, age 37, had attended church with his mom when he was younger. Now God was again making Himself known to Todd.

While waiting for surgery, Pat asked David if she could pray with him...he consented, and as she finished he responded "AMEN." Both comments were so unusual for David. Pat realized God indeed had been working in David's heart that afternoon, and she felt a sense of encouragement that she had never experienced before. God gave her strength, peace, and grace.

After hours of emergency surgery, the prog-

nosis was that David would probably survive, providing there was no serious infection, but it really didn't look good as far as saving his left arm. Both arms and his right leg had to be cut to allow for the enormous amount of swelling. David's recovery was certain to be a long time. His injuries were so severe that he was kept in the trauma unit sedated for nearly a week to allow the healing process to begin.

One week after the accident, Todd walked through the doors of his mom's church. He told his mom: "I'm not going to church for you...I'm going for me." God had already broken Todd's heart. Todd wept and prayed from the time he sat down, long before the message even began. A warning was shared that Sunday: "If you don't respond to the light when you have the opportunity, you may find yourself lost in the darkness." Now with his heart broken, Todd received Christ as his Savior. God's plan of salvation is clear. All men are sinners (Romans 3:10, 23). The wages of sin is death (eternal separation from God) (Romans 6:23). We cannot save ourselves by good works (Ephesians 2:8-9). God loved us so much that He sent Jesus to die in our place (John 3:16). We must trust Jesus only for salvation (Acts 16:31; John 14:6).

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As the invitation to receive Christ was given, Todd immediately responded. Todd later shared that as a child he had made a decision with friends, but really felt that he was just following the crowd. He felt that he had failed to listen to God so many times in the past that he did not want this opportunity to slip past. The outpouring of God's grace and joy were just the beginning for the Kaniewski household.

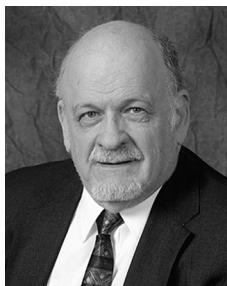
The Sunday prior to Thanksgiving, one month after the accident, the entire Kaniewski family entered Pat's church. God had already prepared David's heart for the message

that morning. As his son before him, David wept throughout the service and responded immediately to God's call of salvation. "When I was trapped in the corn picker, I made a deal with God... Now I want to accept Him, no strings attached. I just want to make sure of my salvation."

What a Thanksgiving for the Kaniewskis! Todd is growing in his relationship with the Lord. He is present at every Sunday morning service. David is able to walk with little or no assistance, and the arm that was just supposed to be a helping arm is well past 50% and improving. The medical obligations, exceeding \$200,000 have all been met without any insurance. David continues to grow in his relationship with the Lord, reading his Bible daily and faithfully attending "his" church each Sunday while serving as a Deacon. He has a thirst for the knowledge of God. He seems to be trying to make up for lost time. Every person who knew the old David praises God for the new David. Every person who has been praying for years for the salvation of friends or loved ones are encouraged to never give up praying.

That Fall day in October 2002...was it a horrible tragedy or a hallelujah triumph? You decide!

# Faith Sized Prayers



Joseph P. Smith

*Joe Smith is IFCA International Director of Health Services Chaplaincy. He has previously served as pastor, church planter with Independent Bible Mission and college professor.*

**O**n entering the room, I encountered the spectacle of a technician making a small incision in Charlie's arm to start a morphine drip into a deep vein. I excused myself, saying I could come back later, but Charlie asked me to stay and the technician just told me to stay away from the wound. While he continued his work, I asked Charlie to tell me what he knew about God, and how he had learned it.

At the age of eight, Charlie had been sent by his parents to live with and work for a neighbor during harvest season. After harvest ended he walked home only to find his parents gone. Abandoned by his parents, he managed to survive childhood without adult help. But he was always plagued by the idea that there must be something terribly wrong with him, because even his parents didn't love him. So he became a recluse. However, he managed to get married and that union produced a lovely little girl who was the joy of his lonely life.

Missionaries from Michigan's Rural Bible Mission (an IFCA member organization now called RBM Ministries) held regular Bible classes in the girl's school. One day she stayed after class so Uncle Mel (RBM missionaries were known as "Uncle" or "Aunt") could tell her how Jesus had made sure she could go to heaven. But after professing faith, she seemed so sad that Uncle Mel asked her why.

"I love my daddy," she said, "but he doesn't know what you just told me!"

Uncle Mel got her address and that night called on Charlie. He must have been a good communicator, because a generation later, Charlie was crystal clear about the Gospel. And even though he had never been to church, he was sure of his heavenly destination.

I wondered if he could read, but I still offered him a copy of Our Daily Bread, a booklet of daily devotionals. I wanted to do more for Charlie and I offered to pray for him.

"No one's done that for me since Uncle Mel," he said. "But sure, I don't see why not."

It's my conviction that in audible prayer, it's important to engage the other in the prayer. But I was very doubtful that Charlie could feel comfortable actually talking to God out loud, so I adjusted to a backup plan and asked him what he wanted me to pray for.

"I've never thought about that," Charlie said.

"Ok, let's start by asking what you need now. And then, what can you believe God can do for you," I rejoined.

*How could he be  
so sure that God would  
take him to heaven,  
but never engage God  
in conversation?*

"Praying for what I need is new to me," Charlie said, "When my parents were gone, I figured it was all up to me. If I wanted a helping hand, I found it at the end of my right arm."

That's a clever turn of phrase. I marveled at the eloquence of this guy who had no "upbringing." Obviously, prayer wasn't a familiar practice. And that seemed incongruous. How could he be so sure that God would take him to heaven, but never engage God in conversation?

"We could start with praying about your treatment," I suggested, "and then for whatever else you need. The fact that you're starting a morphine drip tells me that you're in serious medical trouble."

Charlie turned away as he spoke. "I know the cancer's going to get me. It doesn't seem right to pray to be healed."

"God can do that, Charlie, but He might not. The question is, 'What can you believe God will do for you?' We can pray 'faith sized' requests. Let's not pray for a million bucks, or the moon with a fence around it."

"I know this cancer is going to get me," he

repeated, “but I want to die in my right mind. I don’t want to be crazy with pain, or lose control of myself. And then, I’d like to see Uncle Mel again.”

I couldn’t help noting how important control was to him, and I understood why. But to see “Uncle” Mel again! That was a tall order. Since Charlie said he could trust God for it, I faithfully, but with limited faith, prayed for that. On a Tuesday morning!

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*God’s miracles  
don’t always use the  
supernatural, but they  
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remarkable.*

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It was Thursday before I got back to him. As I came in the door, his first words were, “You found him!”

I had forgotten his prayer request, so I said, “Found who?”

“Uncle Mel!” he responded, “and he lives 150 miles inside of Canada.”

The border was 180 miles from us! “He came here to see me yesterday!”

“I didn’t find him,” I replied. “God must have sent him.” I couldn’t imagine how it had happened. If this wasn’t a miracle, it was certainly an unusual coincidence.

It was later explained to me by a telephone operator at the hospital. She manned an information station near the main door, and knew Uncle Mel from years ago.

“Yesterday he came looking for a sick relative in our hospital, and decided to check the clergy box. He saw Charlie’s name and remembered him from one solitary meeting.” God’s miracles don’t always use the supernatural, but they are just as providentially remarkable.

The medical people did wonders for Charlie. They were able to regulate that morphine drip so that he was relatively pain-free without being sedated, until he died about two weeks later, with God graciously answering his prayer requests. Charlie died in the afternoon after a morning playing checkers with his grandson.

Charlie’s world was a small one, where his primary instinct never got

beyond survival. He had likely never traveled outside the five-county area where he was born and died. His life experiences were difficult and certainly not opulent. But he had a well-loved wife, a beautiful daughter, a bright grandson and a generous God. Somehow our wonderful God opened the door that his xenophobia had nailed shut, and let me in for a little time, for which I am grateful.

“And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.” Matthew 21:22

*This article is an excerpt from Joe Smith’s book Tales from the Toe-Tag Chaplain available on Amazon.com.*

# The Answer Is Still Jesus



Gary Armstrong

Gary Armstrong has served for a number of years as Senior Pastor of South County Bible Church in St. Louis. He has recently accepted the call to serve at the New Braunfels (TX) Bible Church.

**R**ecently, I was asked to lead a class for expectant fathers on fatherhood at the local pregnancy center. The strategy of the Christian pregnancy center is for me to reach the men involved in the lives of the women seeking help for an unplanned pregnancy and equip them to be good fathers. The ultimate goal, however, is to use this class as a springboard for deeper discussions on man's most important need: Jesus Christ.

The targeted clientele for this class is a hodge-podge of men from all walks and stages of life. From single teenage men who find themselves in a position they never wanted to be in, to married middle-aged men getting the surprise of a lifetime when they discover they're having another baby in their forties! There is also much diversity in the religious backgrounds of these families, from atheist and agnostic to Catholic to professing Christian to a Hindu. One thing brings them to this class—they need help being a dad.

So, each week, much prayer is devoted to these individuals as well as asking God for wisdom in navigating the ebb and flow of relationship building and earning the opportunity to share the message of the Gospel. It is certainly a challenge each week to prayerfully ask God, "Is this week the right time to share?" and then to wait on the Holy Spirit's leading in our discussion.

What I have found to be one of the greatest challenges is this: how do you give someone an answer to a question they are not asking? These men are there to learn basic fathering skills to help them become better fathers; however, their real need is Jesus Christ. Most of them don't even know they have this need, but they do. I know it. God knows it. But they need to know it. How do we share the answer to life's most important question when the people we are called to reach are not even asking it?

Many people feel a sense of inadequacy when it comes to facing the challenges of life, and

not just in the area of raising children. Married couples seeking help feel powerless at times to face the trials of marriage. Those ensnared in addiction oftentimes feel helpless and hopeless. Those who struggle with depression and loneliness feel isolated and trapped. So when they come to Christians for answers, they are usually asking the wrong questions. They want to know: "Can you fix me?" or "What must I do to fix myself?" The real answer to all of life's problems is not found with us or in them. It is not in a class, book, or system, but in a person—the living Lord and Savior of the world, Jesus Christ.

*How do we share the answer to life's most important question when the people we are called to reach are not even asking it?*

That may sound like an oversimplification, but it really isn't. Man's greatest need is a relationship with the only hope of the world. It is only in a living relationship with Jesus Christ that we find substantive solutions for life's challenges. How can I be the best father God has called me to be? By abiding in His strength and wisdom. How can I have the best marriage God intends me to have? By drawing from His love and grace. How can I be set free from the addictions of the flesh? By calling on Jesus Christ whose resurrection power is available to me to break any chains. How do I experience the joy and peace of life even when those closest to me have forsaken me? By turning to the only One who is faithful in His presence and promises.

With all the questions many are asking in today's problem-riddled world, the answer is still the same; the answer is still Jesus. Let's share this good news!

# Love Conquers All



Cathy A. Harvey

*Cathy Harvey works as the Administrative Assistant to the Dean of Shepherd's College, a college for students with intellectual disabilities in Union Grove, WI.*

May 2 marked three years since our daughter passed away. How quickly it has gone. She and her two little girls had lived with us for 8 years. Looking back, I see a large canvas of colors, paint thrown on in disarray capturing all the emotions we went through. It has been a kaleidoscope of memories—not easy, but all good because it came from the hand of God.

I remember the soothing music of the string trio at her funeral, the heart-felt testimonies and the tender closing song, Untitled Hymn (Come to Jesus). The sea of grief-stricken faces and the church filled with people wearing her favorite color, blue. We appreciated the tender photographs our sister-in-law discretely took throughout the day. I was touched when the soldier presented her coffin flag; then on one knee, he removed his glove to shake my hand. I remember the flowers and plants, the warm sunny day, and the pile of thoughtful cards.

The first summer was a blur of sitting quietly at work, moving through tasks and taking care of the girls. Our tears were for them. Our daughter was in the arms of Jesus and we would not have wished her back, but at ages 7 and 10, her girls had lost their lifeline. Even though I was named as guardian in her Will, Illinois law required the girls to live with their dad. It was too sudden a tear for us. When my heart was most broken, God whispered, "pray for others," and so I did and it filled me with peace, knowing there were so many worse things going on world-wide.

But God . . .

Such powerful and complete words! But God knew everything . . . past, present, and future, and never left our side. We ached for the girls until we understood He truly was in control. We met with the driver who had accidentally killed our daughter. His apology was so tender and sincere. Our families became friends and at his hearing the attorneys and judge witnessed something they had never seen before – forgiveness – the power of the cross!

Life went on. Christmas week with the girls was all joy. Most special to them were quilts made by ladies from their former school for both of them. The girls wrapped themselves up in memories pieced together from their mom's clothing and, as they pulled the quilts up to their chins, they burst out together, "it smells like Ima!"

*When my heart was  
most broken, God whispered,  
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on world-wide.*

Today, we continue to cling to our Rock, Jesus. When many marriages fall apart as grief steps in, we thank God that our marriage became stronger. We learned the legal system could not help us the way God can, on a heart and soul level. But of all that happened, what I remember the most is the love. Love poured out in so many ways supporting us through the valley of the shadow. Love not bound by distance. Love instead of revenge. Love that forgave the driver. Love freed us all to move forward. Prayers of love that healed and comforted. God's love truly does conquer all.

# 2016 Convention Report



The convention delegates welcomed the new President of Calvary University of Kansas City, Dr. Christopher Cone.



Gracia Burnham shared her powerful story in two sessions at the Women's Conference. She and her husband Martin served the Lord with New Tribes Mission in The Philippines when they were abducted by terrorists and Martin was killed as they were being rescued.



IFCA Board President Paul Seger presented the 2016 IFCA International Faithful Servant award to Dwight Zimmerman of Cedine Bible Camp, Retreat & Conference in Spring City, TN for his years of faithful ministry. Dwight is here with his wife Phyllis.

Three new men were elected to the IFCA International Board of Directors (L to R): Dr. Richard Bargas of Newhall, CA, Steve Wong of San Francisco, CA and Dr. Gary McCall of New Orleans, LA.





This year's General Sessions were inspiring, challenging and motivating as we heard from Stephen Davey, Alex Montoya, Jeff Anderson and Les Lofquist.



At the close of the last General Session, the IFCA International Board of Directors served communion to all the delegates.



Springfield's Abraham Lincoln welcomed everyone on Monday evening.

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# Report on the Ark



The media was present in a large way and Ken Ham was interviewed by numbers of national and international media outlets.



On July 5, The Ark Encounter celebrated its ribbon-cutting with supporters, friends and Christian leaders. Ken Ham invited IFCA International Executive Director Les Lofquist to represent the IFCA members at this historic event. Les was joined by Piedmont International University President Charles Petitt.



The Ark Encounter is now officially opened. It is located in Williamstown, KY which is approximately 40 minutes southeast of The Creation Museum.

# Fellowship News

The Ayrshire Bible Church in Glasgow, Scotland is a BMW church plant which has been assisted by IFCA member Jonathan McPeters (third from right). Les Lofquist preached there recently and is pictured here with the leaders of the church.



IFCA International ED Les Lofquist recently preached at an outdoor evangelistic outreach to hotel workers in Venice, Italy for the Filipino Bible Church. About 100 people attended, half of them unsaved.

The BMW European Field Conference met recently in Germany and 11 IFCA members were present, including 8 of the speakers and seminar presenters. IFCA International President of the Board Paul Seger is speaking in this meeting.

