



*For we were so utterly burdened beyond
our strength that we despaired of life itself.*

— 2 CORINTHIANS 1:8B ESV

At the age of eleven, I had no thought of being commissioned by God to do anything. My first and last thoughts each day were of survival. Would I be able to withstand my father’s brutality, to stay alive one more day?

After sustaining yet another severe beating and choking at the age of eleven, despair overwhelmed me as I lay on the floor of my bedroom wallowing in my own vomit and writhing in pain. It was then that I prayed my first conscious prayer—not of thanksgiving, not of petition, not of intercession, but of despair! My goal in life up to that moment had been to reach the age of twenty; I was certain my father would kill me before then. At that moment, I realized my prayer to reach that ripe old age was in danger of being cut short. Instead of that becoming the darkest day of my life, however, it became the brightest.

With tears streaming down my face, I looked heavenward and cried, “God, why was I born? Why?”

Moments before praying that prayer, my father had returned home from a night of drinking in a drunken stupor.

Surely I had not been born just to be a punching bag for a bigoted, alcoholic father. As quickly as I had whispered those words, the room was flooded with a light so brilliant it blinded me. It reminded me of a giant spotlight—the kind you see tracing its light across the night skies. My terror was uncontrollable. I thought Dad had come back to finish the job. He was going to beat me to death, and this time I would not escape. I heard a noise that sounded like a wounded puppy’s whine and realized the whimper was coming from my own throat. My first thought was to crawl under the bed to protect myself, certain I was about to be the victim of his steel-toed boots.

I covered my face with my hands and closed my eyes as tightly as I could squeeze them. After what seemed like an eon, I realized there was no other sound in the room other than my pain-induced moan. Surely, my father would have already been screaming and cursing, fists flailing. Now there was only that brilliant light. I slowly spread my fingers and eased my swollen eyes open as imperceptibly as possible. I was hoping to see an empty room.

That dazzling light would change my life forever. Although it was not meant to be a prayer, God had heard my cry and answered the anguish of my heart with His very presence. There, lying on my

bedroom floor, I was about to discover who I really was—a beloved child of God, valued, treasured, priceless. This revelation was joy unspeakable.

The light was so vivid it was like looking at the sun but didn't blind me or hurt my eyes. Instead, it produced a warm glow that filled the very core of my being. The light revealed that my father was no longer standing over me, poised to inflict more pain. I could no longer hear his threats; I could no longer see the rage on his drunken and blotchy face. Yes, Someone was there, but the presence was not threatening; it was reassuring. Without being aware of having made that assessment, I felt safe and secure.

Where there had been agonizing pain and paralyzing fear, now there was a supernatural energy. Before the light infiltrated my room, I was depressed, demoralized, and distressed. Where there had been darkness, there was now light—radiant white light. Not a single corner of the room escaped its warming rays.

Terror gripped me as I saw two arms reaching for me. With almost supernatural clarity, I realized those were not Dad's arms. As I looked more closely, I realized that in the center of each wrist was a horrific, jagged scar. It appeared as though each one had been snagged and then ripped open by something large and pointed. Slowly it dawned on me that I had seen pictures of very similar scars on the leaflets we had been given in Sunday school on Easter. Was I hallucinating; or had I gone completely crazy? Jesus would not—could not—be in my bedroom. My mind tried to grasp what was happening. I must have thought

I was having a complete nervous breakdown. That would have explained it.

Something else suddenly occurred to me: Where had my fear gone? Maybe Dad had achieved his purpose—to kill the “bastard” in his house. How could the vision I was seeing be possible otherwise? How else could I experience such power and peace unless . . . was I dead?

My disbelieving eyes followed those arms up and up until I could see the source of the light. I saw, standing there in my bedroom, what could only be the Lord Jesus Christ. He was either clothed in light or in the most magnificent white robe imaginable—whiter than fresh snow; whiter than the clouds that floated in a sun-filled sky; whiter than anything I had ever seen. Draped from His shoulder to His waist was a deep purple cloth—more purple than the heavens at sunset.

As I lifted my head to look into His face, I was instantly drawn to His eyes. They were smiling, happy eyes filled with every color of the rainbow, and they were fixed on me! It was like looking into an illuminated bowl of the world’s most highly prized jewels. I felt as if I could see through them and beyond to heaven and the promise of eternal peace. They were like magnets drawing me into their depths. Keeping His arms outstretched, He looked at me with such an expression of love. Then He spoke words I had never heard before, and His words changed my life forever. Jesus said, “Son, I love you, and I have a plan for your life.”

Instantly I was delivered from all my fears, healed, saved, and called. It would be several years before I understood, theologically, the full impact of what had happened in my bedroom that bleak night. As I have dared to share the story of the atrocities I once endured, the story of a frightened, rejected little boy's terrible suffering has helped to bring healing and hope to hurting people—people struggling for perfection, performance, and praise; people with plastic smiles on their faces and gaping holes in their souls; people of all ages and from every strata of society who so desperately need to hear that a Savior with smiling eyes and nail scars loves, accepts, and values them, and that He has a wonderful plan for their lives.

As my spiritual life began to grow, expand, and mature, I uncovered others in the pages of God's Word that had prayed in despair and received a miraculous answer from Jehovah, including our Lord himself.

A prayer is not recorded for Adam and Eve, but surely they bent their faces to the earth and wailed, or perhaps they were simply rendered speechless when God proclaimed:

The ground is cursed because of you. You will eat from it by means of painful labor all the days of your life. —Genesis 3:17b CSB

Even though God had promised a way of restoration in His pronouncement (see Genesis 3:15), Adam must have been despondent when God drove the two from Eden and then “stationed the cherubim

and the flaming, whirling sword east of the garden of Eden to guard the way to the tree of life” (verse 24).

Everything that has transpired in my life has been because of prayer. One word from God changed my life forever; I realized that prayer was my words to God, but He also spoke to me through His Word. No word from His mouth has ever died. My prayer today is that your faith will soar as you read this book, and you will realize that God can turn your pain into power, purpose, and passion. He stands ready to transform your test into a testimony through the power of prayer.

My commitment to Jesus Christ has taken me not only to Israel, but to places I had never dreamed I would go—Iraq, Kurdistan, Mogadishu, the Soviet Union, Belarus, the White House, the Vatican. In those locales, I met people I never expected to meet—presidents, prime ministers, kings, generals, soldiers, beggars, atheists, and extraordinarily dedicated believers. Doors have been opened of which I had never dreamed, but not by my efforts. John the beloved apostle wrote in Revelation 3:7 (NLT):

This is the message from the one who is holy and true, the one who has the key of David. What he opens, no one can close; and what he closes, no one can open.

The key of David was entrusted to the chamberlain or vizier of the king’s palace. This symbol of authority afforded entrance into every room; nothing was hidden from the holder of the key. For the

child of God, prayer is that key. It permits entrance into the very throne room of heaven—into the presence of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

In the desert tabernacle and later in the temple in Jerusalem, the high priest was the only individual allowed to enter the Holy of Holies, but only once each year: on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. The curtain divided the priests who performed the daily activities in the Holy Place from the holy of holies. It was a barrier so that man would not casually, rashly, or disrespectfully enter into the presence of *El Hakkadosh*, the Holy God, who can not tolerate sin. Habakkuk 1:13 says of Jehovah, “Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrongdoing.”

When Jesus breathed His last breath and gave up the ghost, Matthew tells us that “the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom” (Matthew 27:51 KJV). The temple’s high priest must have been terribly frightened! He was likely unaware that his work was finished, that the Lamb of God had been offered sacrificially one time for the sins of all. As the high priest made his way into the Holy of Holies to sprinkle the blood of the evening sacrifice on the horns of the altar, the veil that separated man from God had been ripped from top to bottom. It was a symbol that we no longer have to wait to be represented yearly by the high priest:

Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold

fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. —Hebrews 4:14–16 KJV

Believers now have free access into the presence of God so that “by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let [our] requests be made known unto God” (Philippians 4:6 KJV).

The work that Jesus Christ had been sent to do was finished. The beautiful David Phelps song “End of the Beginning” says it all:

And though he never ever did a single thing wrong
the angry crowd chose Him.
And then He walked down the road and died on the cross
And that was the end of the beginning . . .
Three days later he rose!

Although specially chosen to minister in the Holy of Holies, there were exact steps that had to be undertaken by the high priest before he could safely step through the veil into the overwhelming presence of God. Now you and I as believers hold the “key” that gives us the privilege that allows us immediate access to Him to make our requests known!