

Praise, Prayer, and the Power of God:  
Modern Miracles

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### Abstract

Miracles exist, and the study of them and their existence has continued for years. By studying credible, contemporary research about miracles, scholars and everyday people alike can determine this fact. The research provides definitions, although one consistent definition is not agreed upon by scholars. Examples of Old Testament, New Testament, and modern-day miracles follow these definitions to prove to those who are searching for answers that miracles happen all the time. The only requirement is for everyday people to look around them and observe the miracles taking place in their lives. In this thesis, I will convey the definitions of miracles, prove they happened and still do, and give Biblical and modern examples of miracles which have been recorded.

### Miracles: What are they? Where do they fit in literature?

Miracles have been recorded throughout history, and they still happen today. They were recorded in the Bible, beginning with the creation of the world in Genesis 1, and they continued throughout the Old and New Testaments. The Bible holds stories of miracles straight from God in Heaven, like Creation or the parting of the Red Sea, from Jesus, like healings and His Resurrection, and finally, from others, the disciples. The term *disciple* does not only include the twelve chosen personally by Christ, but also anyone who chose to follow and believe the life and works of Jesus before and after His death. The title of disciple holds true for those who believe in and follow Christ now. Today, there are many ministers, prophets, and missionaries who are performing God's work and seeing miracles in their lives and the lives of those around them. To study and show ourselves approved (2 Timothy 2:15), Christians must know and understand the works, signs, and wonders of God, Jesus, and the disciples. Knowledge comes through study, and there is a plethora of information to review to prove that miracles are still a daily occurrence.

### **Why Study Miracles**

The study of miracles is like any subject. Scholars, Christians, and those who want more information can look it up, find it, and follow the lines and text to a point of their desired level of knowledge. Miracles, however, differ from many subjects because there are some scholars, scientists, and others who say miracles do not happen and have never happened; they contend that miracles do not exist. According to the *Encyclopedia of the Bible*, the "burden of proof lies heavily on those who assert modern miracles" (Tenney & Silva, 2009). Anyone who believes in miracles must be the one who proves the existence of miracles.

In *Jesus and History: How We Know His Life and Claims*, Waterhouse (2021) quotes John Warwick Montgomery. In this quote, Montgomery shares reasons and thoughts of why it is important to know about miracles.

But can the modern man accept a “miracle” such as the resurrection? The answer is a surprising one: The Resurrection has to be accepted by us just because we are modern men—men living in the Einsteinian-relativistic age. For us, unlike people of the Newtonian epoch, the universe is no longer a tight, safe, predictable playing field in which we know all the rules. Since Einstein, no modern has had the right to rule out the possibility of events because of prior knowledge of “natural law.” The only way we can know whether an event *can* occur is to see whether in fact it *has* occurred. The problem of “miracles,” then, must be philosophical speculation. And note that a historian, in facing an alleged “miracle,” is really facing nothing new. All historical events are unique, and the test of their facticity can only be the accepted documentary approach that we have followed here. No historian has a right to a closed system of natural causation, for as the Cornell logician Max Black has shown in a recent essay, the very concept of cause is “a peculiar, unsystematic, and erratic notion,” and therefore, “any attempt to state a universal law of causation” must prove futile (Waterhouse, 2021).

Montgomery shares that the modern person must discover for him/herself that the Resurrection, indeed, happened so he/she can have a way to believe in miracles at all. The only way to know if something happened, for sure, is to study it for oneself.

People who complete research to learn more about miracles will find that there are various definitions and none of them is considered a standard definition. They will also find many examples in the Bible of miracles. Those interested in studying the concept or reality of

miracles need to find these for themselves. However, in *A Book of Miracles: Inspiring True Stories of Healing, Gratitude, and Love*, Dr. Bernie Seigel (2011) shares a quote from Stacy Chiew. Chiew states,

I believe each one of us holds the key that unlocks the door for miracles. Before you can do that, you need to know the password: Love. Miracles are the response to love expressed in us and to others. It is the extraordinary healing power of our body, the amazing protective energy force that helps keep us safe, and the joy when prayers are answered (Seigel, 2011).

In learning and researching anything, the person must know the way to arrive at the answers. Chiew says that the answer is “love” and that will open the door to all the miracles needed. Through love, people studying miracles can uncover the truth for, and of, themselves.

Looking through all the stories of miracles from the Old and New Testament and modern history, the theme of all the stories is love. The love of God for His people is the biggest, but the love of one person for another is also seen. Chiew could be on to something by saying that love is the key to opening miracles. In opening miracles, people learn more about the idea and concept of miracles, how love opens miracles, and about themselves as people.

Finally, the *Encyclopedia of the Bible* gives three reasons to study miracles: 1—People want to see groups or individuals “continue the apostolic power to perform miracles.” 2—The “so-called scientific view...declares miracles are...impossible...or...relate miracles to ordinary events.” 3—The Christian thinker has a “divinely imposed obligation to know what the Bible teaches,” according to 2 Timothy 3:16 (Tenney & Silva, 2009).

### **Miracles Defined**

To begin any discussion of miracles, first there is a need for a definition. Unfortunately, there “is no standard definition for miracle to which we may all turn” (Metaxas, 2014). A good place to commence any search for a definition is *Webster’s Dictionary*. Therein, the definition of *miracle* is “an extraordinary event manifesting divine intervention in human affairs” (Metaxas, 2014). This definition leads to the belief that someone or something in the divine realm must help in the natural world.

According to Siegel (2011), a “true miracle is often defined as an event that defies the laws of nature.” In the explanation of his definition, Siegel (2011), comments that, “[i]n fact, even so-called ‘bad breaks’ can be classified as miracles because so often they lead us into better directions.” When this definition is applied, losing a job and getting a better one could be classified as a miracle. This could also cover situations when someone is running late only to find out that there is a horrific, deadly accident on the path he/she normally takes; it could have been him/her involved in the accident if he/she had left home at the normal time.

In his article titled “Miracles,” David Basinger (2018) defines miracles in two ways, restrictive and general.

A miracle, in its most general sense, is an event or development that is quite unusual and unexpected—from an unanticipated grade on an exam to the rediscovery of a hopelessly lost item of value to the rapid, welcomed change in how someone behaves. In its more restricted sense, the term applies to those very unusual events that we would not have expected to occur given our current understanding of the relevant natural laws—events such as the emergence of a person totally unharmed from a horrific car accident in which



everyone else died instantly or a person's immediate total recovery from an end-stage terminal disease (Basinger, 2018).

His definition allows for normal, everyday things and extend to magnanimous happenings.

Basinger includes that the mundane can be miraculous, just like the extraordinary.

In "The Miracles of Jesus (II): Jesus and the Evil Powers," Sabourin (1974), shares a definition of *miracles* from Joseph de Tonquedec. De Tonquedec's definition states that *miracles* are a "particular category of wonders which can be attributed to the intervention of a God who is unique and distinct from the world, such as the God of Christians or simply a spiritual philosophy" (Sabourin, 1974). This definition, as with others, relies on a divine being, God, to intervene for humans. Without a divine being becoming involved, there are no miracles, with this definition.

According to Keener (2021), in *Miracles Today*, the "most common definition of a miracle throughout history, from Augustine to Aquinas, has been a divine action that transcends the ordinary course of nature and so generates awe." He says that a miracle is not something like an unusually beautiful sunset, but it has to be something that someone would never expect to happen at all. He also explains that this is subjective because unexpected is different to each individual person. Something that one person expects to happen could be the same thing that another person would never dream of having happen (Keener, 2021).

In his book titled *Water Into Wine?: An Investigation of the Concept of Miracle*, Robert Larmer (1988) suggests that in order to define *miracle*, an explanation is first needed. Miracles can be subjective or objective. The subjective use of the word *miracle* focuses on a person's reaction to what has happened. For example, when a student passing a hard class, "It's a miracle I passed this class." The objective use of the word *miracle* focuses on the event itself. An

example of the objective use would be when someone is describing how they no longer have terminal cancer. Using his understanding of the objective and subjective uses of the term *miracle*, Larmer supplies his definition. He says, “A miracle, then, is an event which nature could not produce on its own; it is supernaturally caused and involves an overriding of the usual course of nature” (Larmer, 1988). He, too, describes miracles as something outside of what nature can do alone.

Finally, *The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible* defines *miracles* as a “term commonly applied to extraordinary events that manifest God’s intervention in nature and human affairs” (Tenney & Silva, 2009). This definition seems to match most closely with the *Webster’s Dictionary* definition provided by Metaxas. The phrasing of the two definitions is almost identical.

Another definition from the *Encyclopedia of the Bible* states that *miracles* are “sometimes defined as an immediate act of God, that is, an act in which God uses no means” (Tenney & Silva, 2009). In doing this, God would cause something to happen without using anything to do it. It would be a “violation of natural law, for all natural processes involve means” (Tenney & Silva, 2009).

The second definition from the *Encyclopedia of the Bible* negates the miracles where God used something to “aid” in His works. For example, the children of Israel cross the Red Sea on dry land in Exodus 14, but God used wind to push back the waters. When the Israelites were across, God used wind again to close the waters on the Egyptians who were coming after Israel. This miracle, a sea parting to allow for an entire country of people to cross safely and on dry land, does not stand up to the scrutiny of the second definition from the *Encyclopedia of the*

*Bible*. God used the wind to complete this feat, so, by this definition, it is not able to be considered a miracle.

However, using other definitions, as listed above, the same occurrence, the parting of the Red Sea, is accurately labeled as a miracle because God divinely intervened to help with human affairs. Although there are many diverse definitions of *miracles*, one thing is common: something out of the ordinary, or what is known to be the ordinary course of living, must occur. It must be caused by someone or something, God, outside of the natural order of things, and the miracle can be completed by God using means or using spontaneity.

### **Old Testament Miracles**

The canon books of the Old Testament of the Holy Bible are filled with miracles. None are as prominent as the first miracle. The first miracle of the Old Testament starts in Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” According to the definitions discussed previously, this is a miracle because a divine being, God (named in the verse), creates something. In this instance, He does it without means because in Genesis 1:2, the Bible states “Now the earth was formless and empty, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” When there was nothing “formless and empty” God created something; thus, this is a miracle.

More miracles occur over the following five days of creation. God creates animals, light, and people; then He rests. The creation of light was another miracle in which God did not use any means. Genesis 1:3 says, “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” Here, again, God spoke, and something happened.

Although God created man on Day Six, the verses that describe this are found in the second chapter of Genesis. In Genesis 2:7, “Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of

the ground.” To create humankind, God used part of the creation He had previously made. This is where some of the definitions mention using means, not just His Godly power, to complete miracles. God used the dirt to create Adam, and then He breathed air into His creation. Later, He uses a rib from Adam’s chest to create Eve.

In Genesis 6, God begins to see the wickedness in the world He created. He plans to curtail it, but He also wants to save the one family who has stood righteous before Him. God gives Noah directions for what to do, and Noah follows the instructions as given. God tells Noah that He is going to send rain, but there has never been rain. Noah did not know what it was or what to expect, but he knew what God had instructed him to do. Noah also knew that God was planning to save him and his family. He did as God commanded. After gathering animals, food, and his family into the ark, God closed the door and allowed the rain to begin falling. The entire earth, God’s whole creation, was destroyed. By Genesis 9, God had destroyed the earth and all the wickedness in it.

After forty days of rain and many more days, months, of the water receding, God showed Noah it was safe to disembark the ark. God had created a place for the ark to safely land with Noah’s family. God opened the door of the ark and allowed Noah and his family to return to dry land. Then, God sent the first rainbow as a sign of promise, a covenant, to Noah that He would never flood the entire earth again. This story holds many miracles, but Christians who grow up hearing it in Sunday school and Sunday services do not recognize the list of miracles.

First, God created rain, something new that had never fallen. God allowed Noah enough time to collect everything he was instructed to take, including family, before sending the rain. Noah and his family, and the animals, did not starve or die during the months aboard the ark. God closed the door to the ark because Noah could not do it of his own power. During the rain,

God destroyed everything He had previously created. It took longer to kill and destroy His creation than it did to create, but God did it and completed the needed cleansing. Finally, after the rain ceased, God allowed Noah and his family a safe place to land and deboard the ark. They freed the animals and celebrated at a new altar. God sent the first rainbow to them; it was another new creation.

Another story of the Old Testament packed with miracles is Moses. Moses was born during a time when his mother was not allowed to keep him, so she and his sister, Miriam, weaved a basket and placed Moses in it. They placed the basket on the river and set him afloat. The daughter of Pharaoh found him and decided to keep him to raise as her own. Moses' sister asked Pharaoh's daughter if she needed a nurse for the baby, and she took their mother, Moses' mother, to her as the nurse. Moses was raised as the grandson of Pharaoh. He was given everything he could ever want or need, materially, but when he saw the treatment of the Israelites, he killed an Egyptian and fled the country. God sent him to a country where he would be safe from harm. Then, when God was ready to use Moses, He appeared in a burning bush, but the bush did not catch fire; "There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up" (Exodus 3:2).

From the bush, God instructed Moses to go to Egypt and get the Israelites from bondage. Moses asked God to allow someone else to go instead, but God sent Aaron to accompany Moses. When they spoke to Pharaoh and told him all the things that God wanted them to say, they performed some miracles through the power of God. God had Moses throw his staff on the ground; it became a snake. Pharaoh, not to be outdone, had his magicians do the same. Moses' rod/snake ate the rods/snakes of the magicians (Exodus 4). God had Moses put his hand inside his garment and pull it out covered in lepers spots. When he put his hand in the garment again, it

returned to normal. God had Aaron turn the water of the Nile River into blood; Pharaoh's magicians were able to turn water to blood as well. Pharaoh did not harken to what God wanted, and God hardened Pharaoh's heart.

As the plagues against Egypt droned on, Pharaoh continued to have his magicians try to replicate everything that was happening. Aaron struck the ground with his rod and gnats covered Egypt, but, this time, the magicians could not do the same.

When Aaron stretched out his hand with the staff and struck the dust of the ground, gnats came on people and animals. All the dust throughout the land of Egypt became gnats. But when the magicians tried to produce gnats by their secret arts, they could not. Since the gnats were on people and animals everywhere, the magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." But Pharaoh's heart was hard and he would not listen, just as the Lord had said (Exodus 8:17-19).

Each time Moses or Aaron performed a miracle through the power of God, the magicians completed it with their secret, dark arts, until God halted their abilities. Once Pharaoh's magicians could not duplicate or imitate the works of God, the true power of the almighty God began to reveal itself to Pharaoh, the Egyptians, and the people of Israel.

The final miracle before Pharaoh allowed the Israelites to leave Egypt was the killing of all of the firstborn, human and animal. God instructed the children of Israel to put the blood of a sacrifice on their door posts so that the Angel of Death would pass their houses. This is one miracle. The Angel knew exactly which houses to pass by the sign of the blood on their door posts. In all the houses of Egypt, the Angel of Death killed the first-born child. This is another miracle because there were possibly several children in each household. If God had not directed the Angel of Death exactly how to work, children in any birth order of the houses would have

died instead of only the first born. In this case, God did use something outside of Himself to cause the miracle. However, this act still fits into several of the definitions of *miracle* introduced previously (Exodus 11).

Once the Israelites fled from Egypt, they went into the desert to worship God and to sacrifice. God sent a pillar of cloud to lead them by day and a pillar of fire to lead them at night. These pillars were not only for leading them but also protecting them. The cloud protected them from the harmful sun and blistering heat of the dry, vast desert. The fire kept them warm and guarded during the cooler nights. When the Egyptians began to pursue the Israelites, God put the pillar of cloud between the children of Israel and the Egyptians to hide and protect His people.

God brought Israel to the Red Sea. This miracle was mentioned earlier as an example of God using means outside of His own power. God used wind to dry the bottom of the sea and to form walls of water on the sides. The Israelites crossed to the other side on dry land, but God caused the wind to blow again and capture the Egyptians in the Red Sea. They could no longer follow and charge after Israel.

These are not all the miracles from Moses' life. Later, God provided food in the desert for Israel. It was enough for one day at a time. The day before the Sabbath, they collected for two days. God provided water where there was none. Finally, He led the children of Israel to the land of milk and honey.

From Moses to the end of the Old Testament, there are many other miracles. For example, Balaam had a talking donkey. The walls of Jericho fell on the seventh day when Joshua and the people of Israel praised, sang, and raised a loud voice. Elijah stayed with a widow and her oil for cooking never ran out, and the three Hebrew boys (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) were thrown into a fire for refusing to worship an idol and only worshiping God, and

the three of them walked out of the furnace without a trace of smoke or ash on them. God used many different things and various people in the Old Testament to show His miracle working power.

### **New Testament Miracles**

The miracles of the New Testament are divided into categories. The two of these categories are: 1) Miracles with no human agent, and 2) miracles with human agents. No human agent means that a person could be affected by the miracle, but the person does not hold responsibility for the completion of the miracle. Examples of this type of miracle are the virgin birth of Christ and the Star of Bethlehem. The earthquake that shook the temple, rent the veil, and opened graves during the Crucifixion is also an example of this category of miracle. One of the most important miracles in this category is the Resurrection of Christ. None of these miracles needed a human to be completed.

Miracles with human agents are miracles performed by people or by God's power through people. These are performed by Jesus and His disciples throughout the New Testament, beginning in the gospels. Some of the stories of miracles are told in all four gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—but other stories are only told in one of the gospels. The number of times the story is told does not make it any more, or less, miraculous.

Also, the miracles of Jesus, depending on the source, are divided into many categories. Sabourin (1975), separates the miracles of Jesus into healings, resuscitations, and nature miracles. For the healings, there are “16 distinct narratives of miraculous cures: 4 of blind men, 3 of paralytics, 2 of lepers, and 7 others: the dropsical man, the woman with the issue of blood, the bent woman, a deaf man with a speech defect, the centurion's servant (or Nobleman's son), Peter's mother-in-law, and the healing of Malcus' ear” (Sabourin, 1975). According to Sabourin



(1975), “Jesus exercises through his miraculous healings the function of shepherd,” and that allows Him to fulfill the prophecy that He will lead the people and protect them like a shepherd.

In 1 Samuel 2:6, Hannah prays that “The Lord kills and brings to life,” and in John 11:25, Jesus says, “I am the resurrection and the life” to fulfill the truth of Hannah’s prayer (Sabourin, 1975). There may have been other resuscitation miracles in Jesus’ life, but the Bible reports three of them: the daughter of Jairus, the son of the widow of Naim, and Lazarus.

Included in the healing miracles are the instances of Jesus casting out demons. One occurrence of this is when Jesus and the disciples arrived at the caves on the coast. There they found a man possessed by spirits. The spirits called out to Jesus and asked Him to leave them alone. Jesus asked the spirits name, and the spirit replied, “Legion.” The spirits asked Jesus to cast them into a herd of pigs that were nearby, and Jesus did. When the spirits entered the pigs, they caused the herd to run down a cliff and into the ocean to drown (Luke 8:26-35).

There are also nature miracles. These are miracles that occur because Jesus caused something to happen in nature. One of these miracles is the large catch of fish for Peter, James, and John as Jesus calls them to follow Him. Another miracle of nature occurred when Jesus walked on the water to His disciples in the boat. They first believed He was a ghostly spirit, but when they realized it was Him, Peter asked to walk to Him. Jesus allowed it. Peter was able to participate in this miracle as long as he kept his eyes on Jesus. Once he looked away into the water, he began to sink, and Jesus saved him (Matthew 14:22-33).

Another miracle involving water happened when Jesus caused the water to still during a storm. He and the disciples were sailing, and the storm came. Jesus said, “Peace, be still,” and the winds stopped, and the storm calmed (Mark 4:39).

One final miracle with water is considered to be the first miracle Jesus performed. He was at a wedding in Cana, with His mother, and the host ran out of wine. Mary told Jesus the situation, and He told her it was not yet His time. She instructed the servants to follow any directions Jesus gave them. Jesus sent the servants to fetch water, and He changed it to wine. The Bible says, “What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which He revealed His glory; and His disciples believed in Him” (John 2:11). Through this first miracle, recounted as a “sign” in Luke 2 of the New Testament, Jesus gained the belief of His disciples for the work they were about to do.

Jesus performed other nature miracles as well. Twice, when he was teaching large crowds of people, he used a small amount of food and multiplied it to feed all of them. The first time, he fed 5000 men (not counting women and children), and the second time it was 4000 men (again, not counting women and children) (Matthew 14:15-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-14; Matthew 15; Mark 8). Each time, the disciples gathered left over food in several baskets. Jesus not only supplied the need of the people, He allowed for there to be food left over.

These miracles fit well into the categories Sabourin (1975) presents. He describes these three categories, and each of the miracles discussed check all the boxes to fit into them. These miracles also fit into the many, or possibly most, of the previously discussed definitions of what a *miracle* is.

### **Modern-day Miracles**

The miracles of the Old and New Testament are powerful and amazing. However, other people view them as part of history and do not consider that miracles continue to occur in modern times. There is proof, however, that the opposite is true. Numerous stories exist to tell of miracles that have happened recently and are happening now.

Some of these stories are well documented in stories and books, but others are hidden in lesser-known books or articles. One of the more well-known miracles of the modern time is told in a book and movie, both names *Miracles from Heaven*. This is the story of Annabel Beam who suffered from pseudo-obstruction motility disorder. Food and drink did not move correctly through her intestines. The family lived in North Texas, but Annabel's doctor, Dr. Samuel Nurko, was located at the Boston Children's Hospital. Dr. Nurko was also an "associate professor of pediatrics at Harvard Medical School" (Beam, 2016). A diagnosis of an incurable medical condition did not stop Annabel from remaining the adventurous child who loved to play outside with her family when she felt up to it.

In 2012, when she was ten years old, Annabel and her sisters were climbing an old tree in their yard. While they were near the top of the tree, it began to give way. Annabel tried to move out of the way so that her sister could climb from the limb which was breaking. Annabel slide into an opening on the old tree that the sisters called the cave. As she climbed in, she realized that there was nothing in "the cave" to support her, and she fell close to thirty feet to the ground. She was trapped inside the trunk of the Cottonwood tree for several hours during the rescue attempt. Once she was retrieved from her entrapment, Annabel told a story of visiting with Jesus. The rescuers rushed Annabel to the hospital, but the doctors could not find any signs of the accident, no internal or external injuries. After the fall, rescue, and visit to the hospital, Annabel no longer suffered from the medical condition in her intestines; Dr. Nurko could only explain it as a miraculous healing (Beam, 2016).

The Beams' story of a miraculous healing is just one modern miracle. On July 2, 2003, Bengt Eriksson visited the Malar Hospital located in Eskilstuna, Sweden. During his testing and procedures, Eriksson was diagnosed with "stage 4 pancreatic cancer, for which the survival

prognosis at the time was usually three to six months” (Keener, 2021). There was a tumor on his pancreas four centimeters large, and the cancer had moved to his liver and was blocking his bile duct. After six weeks of chemotherapy, Eriksson decided to end treatments; they were making him feel worse than he already did and were not meant as a life-saving measure.

Many people in the community were praying for Eriksson. Although he refused further treatment, he did return to the hospital for another CT scan. When the results were available, he returned to the doctor, and he thought he would receive news of more metastasizing of the cancer in his body. His doctor, Dr. Raud, showed Eriksson the images of the scans and said, “There’s no trace of the cancer now” (Keener, 2021). The doctor explained that he still felt that the original diagnosis of late-stage pancreatic cancer was correct, and said, “we doctors can’t explain everything” (Keener, 2021). Another of the doctors involved in Eriksson’s treatment called it a “healing miracle,” and Dr. Raud agreed that he did not have a medical explanation (Keener, 2021).

Another case of a recent miracle is from 2002. “Frederick Ankai-Taylor, a Ghanaian pastor in Vinnitsa, Ukraine” was a minister and a doctor trained in the former Soviet Union (Keener, 2021). He said that when his church prayed for healing miracles, they asked for documentation from a medical provider of the change the person testified to happening. He told a story of a woman the church prayed for in 2002. She was “a woman from Russia with stage 4, metastatic cancer. She was unable to walk, but when he prayed for her, she walked, completely healed. She lived for ten more years before dying from unrelated causes” (Keener, 2021).

In her book *A Treasury of Miracles for Women: True Stories of God’s Presence Today*, Karen Kingsbury opens with a story called “Angel in the Intersection.” In this example of modern miracles, Kingsbury tells of a seven-year-old boy named Mark Stevens. He was learning

about spiritual things in church and with his family, and on the morning of his last day of school, he asked his mother, Melba, if guardian angels are real. When Melba confirmed that she believes they are real, Mark said that he thinks his guardian angel must be huge because he is “the kind of kind who needs a really huge angel” (Kingsbury, 2002).

After school, Mark always walked home with a group of friends. As it was the last day of the school year, the sixth-grade student who typically helped Mark to cross the four lanes of traffic was distracted and talking to friends. One of Mark’s friends, close to his own age, ran through across the street and arrived at the other side with no problems. He dared Mark to do the same, but the student who helped him was busy with friends. Mark decided to run over the street alone. Unfortunately, just as he arrived at the middle of the street all his friends yelled for him. There was a car barreling toward him, and he could not get out of the way (Kingsbury, 2002).

The car hit Mark going around forty miles per hour, and the young boy flew through the air. He landed on his hand a few feet away from where the collision happened. At home, Melba became worried because Mark was almost ten minutes late arriving home. She decided to walk toward the school to see if she could find the friend group on the way home. As she neared the intersection of the accident, she heard the sirens and sped up to get there. Upon arriving at the scene, she searched for Mark and realized that he was the child on the ground. The emergency crew members were checking him, and he looked at Melba and smiled (Kingsbury, 2002).

Melba pushed through the crowd and knelt beside Mark on the ground. She asked him if he was okay, and he replied, “I’m fine, Mom. I saw my guardian angel and I was right. He’s so huge you wouldn’t believe it” (Kingsbury, 2002). Melba felt hope in her body that her son could be fine. As the emergency personnel loaded Mark into the ambulance to go to the hospital,

Melba heard the police and other crew talking. They were saying that Mark fell on his head, but there was no blood at the scene.

At the hospital, the doctors and nurses could not believe that Mark had been hit by a car. One of the nurses asked, “Didn’t he get hit by a car?” and the doctor, just as amazed answered, “Yes. By all accounts he should have died at the scene. And I can’t even find a bruise where the car made contact with him” (Kingsbury, 2002). To this day, Mark tells everyone that his guardian angel saved him. Melba is thankful that God spared her only child. Now, Mark shares this story and teaches about other miracles in his job as a youth pastor (Kingsbury, 2002).

These are only a few of the stories recounted in books and stories. All these miracles hold up the definitions of miracles. There is no other explanation of how these people were healed or saved than to say that a miracle occurred.

## **Conclusion**

Miracles are real; they happen daily. Christians, both in Biblical times and now, have to study the scholarly research provided, the Bible, and their hearts to determine what a miracle is and that miracles are happening every day. Miracles must have a few qualities. One quality is that miracles must be seen. According to Basinger (2018), “To rise to the level of a miracle, an event must at the very least be both experienced by someone and have a significant religious impact on this person.” This means that someone must witness it or be able to prove and testify to its occurrence. Throughout the New Testament, there were thousands of witnesses to Jesus’ miracles. Sometimes, even His enemies watched Him perform miracles; “Those who hated Jesus still believed He could do miracles” (Waterhouse, 2021). This is because “[t]ime after time the New Testament lists Jesus’ enemies as hostile witnesses that He could perform miracles” (Waterhouse, 2021). The Scribes and Pharisees witnessed the miracles of Jesus, and, often, they

tried to charge Jesus with things. His enemies tried to produce charges, religious and/or criminal, they could use against Jesus. On one occasion, they tried to charge Jesus with not respecting the Sabbath because He healed someone, without touching the person, on the Sabbath day.

The Gospels were written by men through the issuance of God. The authors were given the spiritual inspiration to write what God wanted told to the people. Since the Gospels are where the stories of Jesus' miracles are recorded, there are things to be considered. These things help to authenticate the truthfulness of the accounts of miracles.

Certain facts should be admitted by all people, Christian or non-Christian. The New Testament comes from the first century and has not been altered to any significant degree. It contains the witness of people who were ethical and sincere. It would be contrary to human nature for them to suffer death for something they knew to be a hoax, especially when there could be no hope for earthly gain. The New Testament also contains the astounding claim that many of Christ's **enemies** believed He could do miracles. It would be the ultimate stupidity to make such claims if they were false. Everyone in 1<sup>st</sup> century Israel would have known whether such public miracles took place or not, and the authorities could have easily discredited Christian writings if the opposition did not in fact concede that Jesus could do miracles (Waterhouse, 2021).

The authors of the Gospels were there and saw the miracles. Those who did not follow and support Jesus were there and witnessed the miracles. All these people were able to share their stories with the people of their common day, and, as the Gospels still stand, with the people of the modern world.

Miracles transcend time; they are still happening and have never stopped. This means they happen, still, today, but people first need to know what a miracle is and be able to identify

one. People, then, need to look around to search for, find, and witness the miracles that are occurring all around them all the time. People need to realize that miracles occur daily, and, if they are watching for them, they will witness miracles. Modern people—Christians and non-Christians alike—need to understand miracles to be able to see them and explain what is happening in their everyday lives.



### Artist Statement

I believe in miracles. The reason for this could be because I was raised in a Bible-thumping, Pentecostal church. Another reason I believe is that Biblical and scholarly research supply definitions and concrete examples of miracles. These miracles are from the Old and New Testament, but some of them are from the modern day, as well. The most likely reason, however, that I believe in miracles is that I have witnessed them, in my life and the lives of those around me.

I grew up in a family of five—dad, mom, brother, myself, and sister. We attended Concord Church of God, Buffalo and Spring Street and South Concord Church of God for most of my life. My dad was the minister of music at South Concord, and my mom was over Children's Church. Any time the doors were open, and sometimes when they were not, we were at church.

The ladies who sat on the back pew of the church wore their hair up in beehives. The bobby pins literally flew out when the Holy Spirit fell on them, and they shook their heads in a shouting fit. I have seen people run the tops of the pews when the Spirit fell on them. I have heard numerous messages delivered by someone speaking in tongues, and I have waited in prayer for the interpretation to be spoken. I have seen men, women, and children healed after a group of prayer warriors laid hands on them. I have listened to hours and hours of testimonies of the things God has done for people I know and the people for whom they have requested prayer. I, myself, have personal testimonies of healing. Each of these testimonies, mine and others at church, are examples of miracles God has performed in our lives.

I grew up going to Sunday school every Sunday morning and youth meeting or Bible study (with the adults) on Wednesday nights. As a teen and an adult, I have attended prayer

meetings. I learned early in life that Bible stories are not simply things that happened one time, in the distant past. They can, and often do, repeat themselves in the modern, real, everyday lives of myself and the people I know and love. In these classes and study sessions, I learned that the miracles of the Bible were real and still possible for the people in my life and me.

In 2001, two years before I graduated from college, I married an amazing man. In 2003, we welcomed our daughter, who is now eighteen. Chasity is an incredibly talented young lady who just so happens to be a nationally ranked junior amateur bowler. From 2017 until now, we have traveled to four or five different states, as far away as Detroit, Michigan, for her to compete in tournaments. Most of her bowling tournaments are on Sundays. This means that for the past four, almost five, years, we have not been able to attend church on a regular basis. During this time, I have allowed my Bible studying and reading to slip as well.

Recently, I rediscovered a Bible I received as a gift while I was in high school—*The One Year Bible*. It breaks down reading the entire Bible into manageable pieces to read daily. It goes straight through the *Bible*, but each day there is a selection from the Old Testament, New Testament, Psalms, and Proverbs. It is different than other *Bible* reading schedules, and I began reading it. I soon realized that was not enough for me. I needed stories of encouragement; I needed to be able to relate the things happening in my life to what I was reading. I found stories online, followed Facebook pages for inspirational stories, found books of “feel good” stories of what God had done in people’s lives. I began to connect what I learned in church as a child to the *Bible* passages I was reading and the stories I had found. The stories online and in the books were telling the Bible stories again, just in a more modern, and sometimes, more relatable way. Each one was a new representation, a new version, of what God was doing and what He was accomplishing in lives. The fact that God is always the same, never changing, is revealed to me

again. In retrospect, I may have allowed myself to forget that God is ever present and never changing. He is always there and working miracles in our lives.

Now, every day, as I read my devotions and concentrate on His word, God reminds me that He does not expect perfection from me. He does not want me to strive for perfection either. I am perfect the way He created me, and I am part of His miracle of creation. We—He and I—know that I am human and will never achieve a goal of perfection. He only expects me to give, try, and do my best. Messing up does not anger or upset God. It allows Him to show me His grace and mercy in a new way every time. He never told me I had to live or act perfectly; He only asks me to follow the path He has laid before me. Even without perfection, which I will never obtain, God uses me for His plan and His purpose.

In 2020, most of the world shut down. The COVID-19 pandemic scared everyone, and we had to take precautions to protect ourselves and others. During the pandemic, my family—extended included—has gone through some crazy, tough stuff. In April 2020, my dad's father passed away. It was sudden and shocking. He was the glue for our family, and now we are working hard to keep everything together. God has shown me, through all the challenging times, how the stories of the Old Testament and the New Testament are relevant to what I am going through right now.

In my personal *Bible* reading and studying, God is showing me specific things each day. Every day, I note a specific verse or verses that God has pulled my heart toward during the reading. He has been revealing to me how the stories relate to my life and the lives of those around me. He is showing me how the stories may be different in some ways, but He will never change, will always remain the same. God is opening my heart and my eyes to see His miracle-working power in the Bible and in my life today.

As I read the pages of the *Bible* and the inspirational stories I found, I notice that I have some comparable stories from my life and the lives of people I know. I have seen the miracle of salvation in a child. I have seen the sick healed. I am saved, healed, and delivered personally. I have witnessed people showing up at our house with food when my parents could not make ends meet. My family has a collection of miracle stories, and some seem like unimportant things, but we know they are our miracles from God. Some are years old, but we experience new ones all the time. There are some stories from before my birth, and, at least, one is from the most recent Christmas (2021) season. My birth story, obviously recounted to me and usually by my paternal grandmother before she passed, contains a miracle. There are so many stories in the lives of my friends and family that I could write a book.

That is my goal. I will write a book. I will call it *Praise, Prayer, and the Power of God*.

Instead of chapters, I will call each section an “Entry.” This is because each entry in the book will contain evidence of how God’s love and power entered the lives of people I know, including myself. A story will be an entry in the book. I will pair a *Bible* verse, story, or reference, with a summary, to each entry. Each entry will have song lyrics paired to them, as well. No matter what, each entry—story, *Bible* reference, poem, and song—will combine to show the *Praise, Prayer, and Power of God* in the lives of people.

This book will use all the things that God has blessed me with to show His grace and power in the everyday lives of others. Some days, I worship in words. I write prose and tell God what I am thinking. Other days, He gives me poetry to describe His awesomeness. My favorite days are the days God gives me songs to sing and hear. The best part is when He tells me with whom I am supposed to share the songs He has allowed me to find that day. He has yet to allow me to write a song of my own, but if, or when, He chooses that path, I will follow. I worship in

reading, writing (poetry and prose), and listening to and singing music. I know that many, maybe even most, other people worship in many of these same ways as well.

I want to be able to use these avenues God has given me as blessings for others. If I share *Bible* verses and *Bible* stories, real life stories, songs, and poems, I think it will touch more people because of the variety in the messages. God has given me the gift of writing. I have known for a couple of years now that I am supposed to write our family miracles. I believe that God has aligned this time for me to do it now.

I believe in miracles. Maybe it is because that is what I was taught as a child. It could be because of the strong men and women of faith among my family and friends. It is possibly because Biblical and educational scholars have been able to prove it in their works and I can study for myself. Mostly, I believe, miracles happen because God has allowed me to see and experience some for myself. As a writer, I want nothing more than to be able to show others the love of God through the miracles He has performed in the lives of my family and friends. God is still a miracle-working God, and I want to use the writing talent He has bestowed upon me to share that information and be a blessing to others who need to experience, even through reading, the miracle-working power of an everlasting God.

## Annotated Bibliography

Broocks, R. (2016). *Man, Myth, Messiah: Answering History's Greatest Question*. W. Publishing Group.

The author of this book also wrote *God's Not Dead*. This is the sequel to that book, and the author raises big, challenging questions. The toughest one being “Does Jesus really exist?” Through research and examples, the author proves that Jesus and miracles do, in fact, exist. This source is part of the resources used in the critical paper of this thesis project.

Dolan, T. M. (2019). *Who do you say I am?: Reflections on the Bible, the Saints, and the answer that is Christ*. Penguin Random House.

In this book, the author predates the pages for the reader to follow along on a 365-day journey. He tells stories for inspiration and includes a *Bible* verse for reference. Each story is no longer than one page. This source is being examined as an example of devotional material available at this time to inform the writing of the creative manuscript of this thesis project.

Graham, B. (2017). *Hope for each day: Words of wisdom and faith*. Thomas Nelson.

In this daily devotional, dated for 365 calendar days, the author provides a *Bible* verse and a story to accompany it. At the end of each daily reading, a “Hope for Today” section gives the reader more to think about in terms of the verse, story, and concept of the day. This book is being used as an example of what is available for devotions as compared to the creative manuscript of this thesis project.

Groeschel, C. (2020). *Dangerous prayers: Because following Jesus was never meant to be safe.* Zondervan.

In this book, the author teaches the reader how to pray. He explains why prayers should be “dangerous.” These prayers should be honest and vulnerable so God can hear the person speaking directly from his/her heart. This book is broken into sections, and each section is divided into chapters. There are three sections, not counting the introduction and conclusion. At the end of the book, there are discussion questions for the reader to use to examine his/her own prayers and prayer life. Finally, there are “dangerous” prayers from the *Bible* printed after the discussion questions which invite the reader to “Pray a Dangerous Prayer Today.”

Gunn, R. J., & Hannan, C. (2006). *Take flight!: A sisterchicks devotional.* Multnomah Publishers.

This book is an undated devotional and journal. The two authors each present a story: Robin’s Nest and Cindy’s Perch. There is a list of verses for the readers to take a closer look at what the *Bible* says about the concepts of the stories. They provide lines for journaling about the topic as well. Each section includes thoughts from the scripture, quotes to use and/or consider, and suggestions of how to use what the authors discussed during in the stories. This source is being used as an example of what devotional materials are available to compare to the creative part of this project.

Johnson, L. T. (2019). *Can we still believe in miracles? We can, we must.* *Commonweal*, 146(4), 14–19.

As stated in the title, the author poses the question of whether people should believe in miracles. He also answers his own question in the title; yes, people should believe in

miracles. He discusses how God miracles concern God's presence and how God interacts with people today as He did in older times. This article will be used as a source for the critical paper of this thesis project.

Keener, C. S. (2021). *Miracles today: The supernatural work of God in the modern world*. Baker Academic.

The author of *Miracles Today* raises the question of "Do miracles still happen in today's world?" Through research, he shows that miracles have been occurring throughout history and still today. He recounts several accounts of miracles which are incontestable to his research. This source will be used as part of the critical paper of this project.

Knuth, J. (2018). *The prayer list: ... and other true stories of how families pray*. Loyola Press, A Jesuit Ministry.

The author of this book tells stories of how prayer has affected the lives of people. She explains to the reader how to make and use his/her own prayer list. This source is being used in comparison of the creative manuscript of this thesis, as both deal with prayer and how it affects people's lives.

Lucado, M. (2006). *Facing your giants: A David and Goliath story for everyday people*. Thomas Nelson Publishers.

In this book, the author uses *Bible* stories to illustrate points of living for people in today's world. Each page includes a *Bible* reference, and the stories/chapters are several pages long, unlike a daily devotional book. This source is being used as an example of what is available in the devotional section in comparison to the creative manuscript of this thesis project.



Metaxas, E. (2014). *Miracles: What They Are, Why They Happen, and How They Can Change Your Life*. Penguin Group.

In this book, the author provides evidence of miracles that have occurred. He begins by introducing what miracles are. He explains and describes several types of miracles throughout the book. Some of the types of miracles discussed are conversion, healing, angelic, and touching eternity. This source will be used in the completion of the critical paper of this project.

Murphy, W. (2015). *Praying through it: 365 days worth of prayers that make praying easy*. CreateSpace.

This book contains 365, undated prayers. Each page contains a prayer and a *Bible* verse for reference. Each page also has a power word or phrase for that verse and prayer combination. The book is sectioned into months, but, again, there are no dates. The reader can move through the sections as his/her choosing. This source is being used as an example of what is available in the devotion section for comparison to the creative section of this thesis project.

Spurgeon, C. H., & Clarke, R. H. (1994). *Morning and evening: An updated edition of the classic devotional in today's language*. T. Nelson.

This book is a daily devotional which is broken into morning and evening readings, as the title suggests. Each day is dated and labeled for either morning or evening. There is a *Bible* verse, shortened and cited at the top of each page. Facing pages are one day, two readings. This source is being used to see what is available already in the devotional section as an example for the creative manuscript of this thesis project.

Waterhouse, S. (2021). *Jesus and History: How We Know His Life and Claims*. Westcliff Press.

In this book, the author discusses the life of Jesus and how it fits into what is already known. He explains in the beginning of the book that this was originally written as a way for his son, an Army soldier, to be able to know more about the topic, at his son's request. One chapter is specifically dedicated to the discussion of the miracles of Jesus, and that is what is used in the critical paper of this project.

Williamson, M. (2014). *A year of miracles: A daily devotional*. HarperOne.

In this daily devotional, the author shares stories of miracles that have occurred in people's lives. Each story is less than one page. The days are numbered and not dated. At the end of each story, the author includes a prayer for the day. This book is being used as an example for the creative manuscript section of this thesis project, as both deal with miracles in the lives of people the authors know.

Young, S. (2004). *Jesus calling*. Integrity Pub.

In this daily devotional book, Young presents stories about how Jesus is calling to the reader to come into a closer relationship with Him. The book is about the size of an adult hand and includes dated pages for every day of the year, including February 29<sup>th</sup>. The stories are short, fewer than eighteen lines, in most cases. They are never more than a page. At the bottom of each page, there is a scripture reference. This source is being used as an idea of what is already on the bookshelves in comparison to the creative manuscript part of this project.

Praise, Prayer, and the Power of God:

Stories of Modern Miracles

by Leslie Parker Jackson

To my family—who believed I could do things I never considered possible

### Saving My Life

Proverbs 19:20—God helps with choices

20 Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end.

Throughout my life, I have had to make choices; we all have. We make small choices every day, like what clothes to wear or how to do our hair. We make big choices, like what school to attend or what job to take. We cannot avoid choices. Some of them will have major implications for our lives. I have made a few of those, and I know everyone else has too. The good thing about choices is that God often allows us more time than we need to make the correct choice. He gives us time to choose what is in His plan and not what we want. Before we make choices, great or small, we need to consider how they will affect our lives and how they will, or will not, fit into the plan God has for us.

### Saving My Life

As I looked straight ahead at the yellowish wall of the doctor's office, I heard the nurse say, "450.9." My eyes teared up as my gaze began sliding down the wall to the display of the digital scale I was standing on. I needed to verify that I had heard the correct numbers from the nurse.

"Mrs. Jackson, are you alright?" The nurse's voice jolted me back to reality.

"I'm...well...I'm not sure how I am." My voice cracked, and hot tears rolled down my cheeks.

I should not have been shocked. I was in the office of Dr. B (full name withheld), the local bariatric surgeon. During the summer of 2013, my primary care doctor had asked me a simple question, "Mrs. Jackson, do you want to live to be 40?"

I was 35 years old, and my daughter was almost 10; of course, I wanted to live to be 40.

"Doc," I laughed, "I want to live forever. Why?"

"Your weight has finally gotten out of control, I think. You are pre-diabetic. You are going to start having more medical and health issues, if you can't get this under control, quickly." Dr. H (name withheld) has been my primary care doctor for about 10 years now, and she is very open and straightforward with me. I appreciate that, and she is still completely upfront with me; she does not let me cut corners.

She told me in 2013 that I needed to get my food, exercise, and health under control and start planning for a drastic life change, and it would probably include weight loss surgery. I put it off as long as Dr. H would allow me. Finally, just before Christmas 2013, I made an appointment to go to an information session about weight loss surgery. My appointment was in March 2014, the earliest I could make it. I did not wait until the information session to begin making some

changes. As part of a special twenty-one day fast, the Daniel Fast, at my church, I gave up sodas. I thought it would be really hard, but it was much easier than I anticipated. The Daniel Fast began at the stroke of midnight on January 1, 2014, and I was determined to drink as much soda as I could before the fast began.

On New Year's Eve 2013, my husband, daughter, and I went to my parents' house to celebrate. At 11:30 PM, I loaded up my cup, a large, heavy, glass mug that held almost half of a two-liter drink. I put just enough ice in the bottom of the glass to keep the drink from being warm at all, then I poured in the Sprite. I had given up caffeine in 2002 when I found out I was having my daughter, so I only drank Sprite and Sierra Mist. Now, I was giving up all carbonated drinks, including sparkling water, for a minimum of a year. My daughter and husband had accepted the challenge as well. As the ball began to drop in Times Square, I grabbed my mug that was still over half full and started drinking. By the time 2014 arrived, I had finished my mug of Sprite and was ready for the challenge.

After a week or so, I did not realize that I was missing soda. A couple of months later, my husband accompanied me to the information session about the weight loss surgery. We heard all the benefits and risks. We listened to the surgeons talk about the types of surgery. Finally, we heard success stories from some of the doctor's previous surgery patients. At the end of the night, I scheduled a consultation with the doctor. I was still on the fence, but he could answer questions specifically about me and my situation. The earliest I could get in was July, so I took it.

Between the information session and the consultation, I began changing little things. I altered my eating the best way I knew. I researched what to eat and how to eat. These were

things I could have and should have done years before, but I had never had the motivation to do it.

When July finally arrived, my husband and I went to meet with the doctor. This is when the nurse gave me the number, 450.9. That was the heaviest I had ever been. I had convinced myself that I was still under 400, but I rarely weighed myself at home, and once I reached 350, it was hard to be weighed on a *normal* scale at any doctor's office. When I visited a doctor, I would say, I was *such and such* last time, and they would write it down and not weigh me. The weight of 450.9 meant that I was simply one-tenth of a pound from being 451, and that was closer to 500 than 450.

As the tears rolled down my face, my husband grabbed my hand and whispered, "Babe, you've got this. It's only a number."

It wasn't just a number, but he was trying to console me. He knew when he married me that I had struggled with my weight since high school. I was always the heaviest girl in my classes and, sometimes, the heaviest student, period. There were some boys in my classes that were bigger, but it was acceptable because they played football. According to my classmates, there was no reason for me to be so big.

Walking down the hall to the exam room, I looked at my husband and gave the best fake smile that I could. We both knew I was broken by this number, but I did not want to break down *because of it*.

During the conversation, the doctor said there were some things I would need to give up for the rest of my life in order for the surgery to be successful. He began listing things like alcohol, smoking, extracurricular drugs, and soda. I remember that he laughed at me when I gave my response to the list.



“That will be easy. For those things: Never done it. I’m allergic. I hate Tylenol. I gave up soda for the year, and I’m doing well with it. I just won’t drink them again.”

The nurse in the room chuckled and told the doctor that those are the hardest four things for people to release, and I would not have a problem since I was not doing any of them. They reviewed my medical records with me, gave me a plan of action, and finally set me up with an appointment with the nutritionist in the office.

Within a month, I was in the nutritionist’s office. She gave me a meal plan and a lot of resources to help me prepare for surgery. In the months that followed, I joined a local gym and began working with a personal trainer. In the year before surgery, I began losing weight. It felt awesome, and I could not imagine how great it would feel if I went through with the surgery.

During my decision-making process, I was teaching English full time at a local high school. I was having some issues at my job; a couple of students were lying about me and trying to get me fired. By spring break in March 2015, I was being given a choice at work. I could resign, so it would look better on my resume, or I could just allow the school not to renew my contract; that would make it harder to get a job because it would look like I was fired.

A week after we returned from spring break, I submitted my resignation letter. I wanted something better for myself. That same day, I called Dr. B’s office and asked them to start running my insurances to see what my out-of-pocket expenses would be. I knew that my insurance from the public school system would end on July 31, 2015, and I also had a secondary health insurance policy through my husband’s employer. I wanted to ensure I was using both insurances to pay for the surgery so it would be cheaper out of pocket.

A couple of days later, I received the call letting me know that I could schedule my surgery any date I wanted. I told the nurse I wanted to finish out the school year, and the last day

of school—my last day of teaching at the school as well—was June 10, 2015. I scheduled the surgery for 8 AM on June 11, 2015.

I began packing the things from my classroom into boxes, crates, and tubs. I had been in the same classroom for three years. Every year, I brought a little bit more—okay, fine, a lot more—stuff with me. Once everything was packed, I began taking things home. I had a minivan with collapsing seats, and I still had to take three loads. On my last day, my husband came to the school to help me make sure I took everything with me. He helped me load everything into the van. As we walked down the hall with our last load of stuff in my collapsible red wagon, I called out, “Jackson leaving for the last time!” The other teachers came out to say good-bye. Considering how the year had ended for me, I was really emotional. I cried as I hugged and high-fived my soon-to-be former co-workers. They stood in the hall as I left and waved as I turned around to look their way one final time.

None of them knew that the next morning, I would be having a life-saving operation. I arrived at the hospital on the morning of June 11, 2015, at 6:30 AM. My parents, daughter, and husband were there. I was able to see them all at some point before surgery. The actual surgery was supposed to take three hours but lasted over four hours. Although my husband had been to every appointment with me, the first person I asked to see was my dad. I closed my eyes waiting on Dad to come to the recovery room, and my mom came in instead.

“Where is my daddy?”

“He is at home with Chasity,” mom answered. “Chasity was getting restless, and I took her and Dad to the house.” My daughter was only 11 at the time, and she had been up since 5 AM that morning. I was surprised she had not passed out on one of the seats in the Surgery

Center waiting area. However, she had made it as long as she could, and Mom took her and Dad to their house so that they could relax. She promised me that Dad would come to see me later.

Dr. B came in to check on me and tell me that everything went well. I had opted for the Bariatric Sleeve surgery. During the surgery, the doctor removed two-thirds of my stomach, and it now looks like a sleeve, a tube. He told me that I would be able to go to a room upstairs as soon as I could walk around and take myself to the restroom. Within an hour after he told me that, I was up walking, but I did not get a room. My surgery was completed by noon, but I did not make it to a room until after 7:30 PM. I could only have one person visit me at a time because I was in the recovery area. I had done what Dr. B told me to, but I did not get the reward of a room. I was irritable and thirsty. However, I was not allowed to have any food or drink for 24 hours after the surgery. I had to wait until noon the next day to eat or drink. Then, I could only have one ounce of a protein shake at a time. I had a cup of ice water beside me, and I could sip on it all the time, but I could only sip. I had to allow my stomach to heal, obviously, but it was not working.

I felt sick. I felt like I was going to throw up as soon as I swallowed the protein shake. I was supposed to be able to go home on Friday, 48 hours after the surgery, but I had to stay until Saturday. We figured out, not very quickly, that I could not handle the chocolate in the protein shake. Every day for an entire year before the surgery, I had drunk a chocolate protein shake, the same brand the hospital served just to be ready. I loved them, so much so that I had purchased a large case before the surgery. The doctor had warned me that there was a chance my taste buds would change within a couple of days of the surgery, but I would not have thought I would detest chocolate. Around 5 PM on Friday, the nurses and I decided to try a new flavor. It worked, and I

liked flavors I had not liked prior to surgery; it blew my mind. I was excited to know the problem, but I was going to have to get new protein shakes for home.

On Saturday, when I was released from the hospital, my husband came to pick me up, but he had to take me to my parents' house. Our daughter was playing in a softball tournament that day, and he had to get back to the field. He made sure I had everything I needed, and then he left me with my parents. In order to get used to my new way of life, I had a lot of timers and alarms set on my phone. Every twenty minutes, if not sooner, I had to drink water. Every hour, I had to get up to walk down the hall and around the dining room table. Finally, every two hours, I had to "eat." Eating, for the first two weeks, consisted of two ounces of a protein shake at a time. There were times, in those first few days, that I took almost an hour to drink those two ounces. It was hard; I was not hungry, but I had to force myself to drink the protein shake.

As I approach the 6-year anniversary of my surgery, my life is still different. In those first two weeks after surgery, I lost 25 pounds. Two weeks later, I was down over 50 pounds total. At the one-year mark, I had lost over 150 pounds, and I was feeling great! I had to buy new clothes. I was working out daily. I was becoming a new person, inside and out. I loved myself more than ever!

In the end, I lost 250.9 pounds. I was down to 200 pounds and trying to get into "one-derland," but I did not achieve that. Over the past couple of years, I have added some of the weight back on, but I never foresee myself becoming the person I was before my surgery in 2015. When I was 35 years old, I made the decision to save my life, and so far, it has worked out well.

Human, Me

I'm an extrovert.  
I love being the center of attention.  
I hate being alone.  
I love meeting new people.  
I hate sitting in silence.  
I love events, travel, concerts, and plays.  
I hate sitting at home.

...But...

...Sometimes...

I'm an introvert.  
I hate getting attention.  
I love sitting alone.  
I hate being with strangers.  
I love the quiet.  
I hate events and large crowds.  
I love hanging out at home.

I'm an introverted extrovert

or

I'm an extroverted introvert.

I'm complicated.

I AM HUMAN.

“Save My Life”—Sidewalk Prophets

“Tell me what I need to hear  
Tell me that I'm not forgotten  
Show me there's a God  
Who can be more than all I've ever wanted

'Cause right now I need a little hope  
I need to know that I'm not alone  
Maybe God is calling you tonight  
To tell me something that might save my life  
Save my life”

I once heard it said that God does not allow us to wake up every day for us. He wakes us every day because someone needs us. This song is talking about telling others about God who can help, save, and deliver them. It could just as easily be referring to literally saving someone's life. Sometimes a little kindness from a stranger, a friend, or someone we have not seen in a while can make our day. What if we were that one bit of kindness that helped someone see God's love?

Each day when we wake up, we should try to find the person who needs us. Try to find the person for whom God has allowed us to wake up. We may not find him/her, but if we are portraying the love of Jesus to every person we meet, we can still make a difference in the lives of others. We never know how many lives we can touch in a day, so we need to be the hands, feet, and heart of Jesus to everyone with whom we come into contact.

## Seven-Year Plan

Genesis 1: God completed Creation in seven days

- 1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.
- 2 And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.
- 3 And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.
- 4 And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.
- 5 And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth,” and according to the Bible, it took Him seven days. Seven is an important number for God, and He uses it often. In my life, seven has been an important number but never more important than when I was attending college. God allowed me to pick my own path, but then He showed up and gave me other directions. God created everything in seven days, and He allows us to be the people we want to be and become who we want to become. He also gives us direction and shows us where He wants us. It is our choice, our free will, to decide if we want to follow Him or not. However, I have learned that following Him gives me much more peace and security than doing my own thing.

### Seven-Year Plan

From the time I started elementary school, I knew I would go to college. When I was in middle school and early high school, I was convinced I was going to go to become a lawyer. However, by the time I graduated from Concord High School, home of the International Award-winning Spider Marching Band, I knew I was going to teach. At graduation, on June 14, 1996, the plan was in place and the course was set.

Other than sleepovers and trips to stay with my grandparents and great-grandparents (in the same town), I had only been away from home once. My sophomore year of high school, I travelled to Ireland, with the high school marching band. It was my first time on a plane, and we went to participate in the Saint Patrick's Day festivities in Dublin and to celebrate Concord, North Carolina, becoming the sister city of Killarney, Ireland. That week there was the most amazing thing I had ever done, and it was one of the hardest things I had ever done.

Upon graduation from high school, I was set to attend Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina, and major in Music Education. The plan was that I would complete my three years of classes there and come home to do my student teaching my senior year. After that, my high school band director was planning to retire and allow me to step in his position. That was the dream; that was the plan.

We all know that plans change, and dreams are sometimes deferred. As I attended classes at Appalachian State, I loved them, but they were hard. I had to learn to hear notes of music and name them. I had never done that. I was signed up for, and attempting, more than twenty credit hours a semester. Many of my music classes, like Violin, Piano, and Concert Band, were only one credit each; so, I had a lot of classes to maintain. The first semester, I was in survival mode, and I made it. My grades were not amazing, but I did it. I *survived*.



The second semester came. The class load was about the same, but I did not have Marching Band, and that was the one class I loved more than all the others. That is where my heart was. I made it, kicking and screaming, to spring break. I returned to school for the last few weeks of classes for the year.

I returned to campus from spring break on Sunday, and on Tuesday I could not get my mom on the phone. I could not get anyone to answer at home. I always talked to my mom in the mornings before I went to class and at different points during the day.

As I was heading out to a rehearsal that afternoon, the phone in my room—there were no cell phones—rang. I grabbed it because my roommate was on the other side of the room working.

“Hello?”

“Hey Kiddo! Come let me in.”

I was completely shocked. My dad was there to visit me! My dad, a tractor trailer truck driver, had many different routes. Sometimes they lead him to the mountains, and I knew if he was nearby, he would stop in to see me. I told my roommate my dad was here, and I was going to let him in. At the time, at Appalachian State, there was a call box downstairs. Visitors could come in the first door, but to get all the way into the building, they had to call the room and have the girl come down. Yes, I was in an all-girls’ dorm.

I was only on the second floor, so I ran down the steps, into the lobby, and toward the glass vestibule. As I got closer to the door, I realized that Dad was not dressed for work. Our pastor, Dr. Greg Sloop, was with him. I thought it strange, but the pastor’s family and ours were great friends, so it was nothing to cause alarm. I knew something was wrong, though, when I

opened the door to allow them in. My mom was in the corner. She had been crying, and I knew she should have been at work.

“Hey Kiddo,” Dad repeated.

There were hugs all around as they came in the door, and we started to talk.

“Hey, what’s up?”

“We need you to come home with us.” My dad’s voice was sullen.

“I just got back from spring break; I can’t leave. I’m about to go to rehearsal now.”

Pastor Sloop stepped forward and took my hand as my dad said, “Les, Grandpa Edwards died this morning. You have to come home.”

There were several couches in the lobby where the students gathered. Luckily, no one was sitting on the one nearest me because I collapsed. I fell onto the couch and cried. None of this was possible. I had just seen Grandpa Edwards that weekend before I returned to school. “Let’s go get your stuff and get you packed up,” Dad stated calmly.

We rode the elevator to the second floor and walked to my room. Pastor Sloop stood in the doorway as my parents and I went in to talk to my roommate. I made Shannon, my roommate, a list of my professors, and she agreed to email them for me.

The next week was a blur. Family was everywhere. I saw people I had not seen in a couple of years. Some of my cousins had babies I had never met. Everyone, no matter what, did everything that Grandma Edwards asked or needed.

The following week when I returned to school, I had to deal with make-up work, missed rehearsals, missed private lessons, and rescheduling playing tests for my classes. One of my professors, in my Violin class, was a jerk about the situation. When I went to meet with him about making up things I missed, he looked at me and said, “It’s only death. Everyone dies. You

should have been here. Now I have more work to do because you decided to go home because of a death.”

Unfortunately for him, the Dean of the School of Music was one of my professors, my advisor, and my work-study coordinator. When I was working with the Dean, he asked me how I was doing with getting everything caught up. I told him that most of my professors were being gracious about timing and allowing me to grieve and work. However, there was one that was not cooperating at all. When I told him which professor it was and what he had said to me, the Dean called him into the office while I was there. The professor repeated to the Dean the exact same thing he had told me about death, funerals, and making up my work. I remember thinking that was the most brazen act I had ever witnessed. Ultimately, I was allowed to complete my Violin makeup work with the Dean instead of the professor.

The rest of the semester did not go by without a hitch. In all, there were three deaths in our family or close friends in those short months. My grandfather, my uncle’s wife (my aunt), and my great-grandfather’s best friend (who was like another great-grandfather to me) all passed between March and May. I came home for two of the funerals—my grandfather’s and the best friend of my great-grandfather’s, and I missed a lot of assignments and classes. At the end of that semester, my GPA was just above a 2.0. I was put on academic probation, and if I did not get my grades up the following year, I was going to lose the partial music scholarship I had received.

That summer, I made some dramatic changes. I decided to quit school, but that did not go over well with my dad. He offered me another suggestion.

“Why don’t you go to Rowan for a year or two? Then you can transfer back to ASU to finish.”

“I can do like one class, but that’s all I’m taking.”

The next day I went to Rowan-Cabarrus Community College and completed my placement tests for English and Math. I met with an advisor and walked out registered for six classes. Who was I trying to fool by saying I was only going to take one class? I loved school and still do. Two-and-a-half years later, I was close to completing my Associate of Arts degree. I needed another Chemistry class and two other classes, but I hated Chemistry. What was I supposed to do?

I transferred. In January 2000, I moved all my classes from Rowan-Cabarrus Community College to the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. My new major was Elementary Education with a focus on reading. I spent one, relatively uneventful semester, at UNCCCharlotte. I hated it. I felt like a number and not an important human. The *only* eventful thing that happened there was that my now-husband proposed to me on Valentine's Day, our six-month anniversary.

By May 2000 when the semester ended, I had decided I wanted to transfer and change majors again. This time, I transferred to the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. I began as an English Education major. I was going to teach, or so I thought. By Christmas break, I had met the worst English professor ever, and that is a story for a different day. I changed majors again. This time, I had a better plan. I was going to do something fun, and I was going to get a federal grant to do it. I did. I had read in the UNCG student newspaper about a federal grant being offered to complete the interpreter program; I applied and received the grant. I switched to the Deaf Education major to become a Sign Language Interpreter.

I completed the program at UNCG but not before getting married on May 19, 2001. In November 2002, we found out that our daughter was on the way; so, on May 18, 2003, I waddled across the stage as they called my name in the School of Education graduation ceremony. My official degree is a Bachelor of Science in the Education of Deaf Children with a Concentration

in Educational Interpreting, with a Minor in English. No, all of that does not fit on the degree certificate, but in May 2003, I became a college graduate.

I may have taken a longer path than expected, but I made it to where God wanted me to be when He wanted me to arrive there. Seven is a good number, sometimes considered perfection. I think that God charted the path of my undergraduate education to His perfection.

## Seven

What comes in sevens?  
A septet or a heptad

Days of Creation  
For the world God made

Seas and continents  
Days of the week

Are more of the sevens  
I diligently seek.

Innings before you stand up to stretch  
Games if you are playing in a championship set

Dwarfs with Snow White  
Who worked days away

Deadly sins  
For which we must pray.

Wonders of the world  
Both modern and ancient

Revelation churches, bowls,  
Seals, and trumpets

Years before Jubilee  
In Israeli celebration

Colors in a rainbow  
Given for a covenant

Ways Christ described Himself  
To His disciples as He taught

Things Christ said  
As He died on the cross

Qualities of a Savior  
Prophesied by Isaiah

Petitions to God  
Demonstrated in the Lord's Prayer

Dips in the Jordan River  
For Naaman's healing

Laps around Jericho  
Before the victorious feeling

So many things  
Arrive in sevens

It seems the perfect number  
Of the Heavens

“Daystar”—Gaither Vocal Band

“Lead me Lord, I'll follow. Anywhere you open up the door  
Let your word speak to me, show me what I've never seen before  
Lord I want to be your witness, you can take what's wrong and make it right  
Daystar shine down on me, let your love shine through me in the night”

The words of this song are so true to many stories in my life. However, these lyrics resonate most with me when I think of my first year of college. I needed to follow where the Lord wanted me. I was not doing it at the time, but I strive more and more daily to do that. My first year of college was many years ago, and I have tried to make a point since then to stay on the path God has laid out for me. His way is not my way, and His plans are not my plans. I want Him to show me the path so I find the promises He has for me.

In life, we have to follow God into places we never expected to be. We have to be willing to change in the middle of what we want or what we are doing to go do things He wants us to do. Always be willing to follow, and God will open doors for which you never thought there was a key.



## Out of Nowhere

Job 1: 10—God protects us

10 Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land.

In the book of Job, Satan asks permission of God to tempt Job. Job is righteous, and God has blessed him with children, family, money, cattle, and anything else he could want or need. Because of this blessing, Satan must ask permission. God lifts the protection He has around Job's life, but the caveat is that Satan cannot *kill* Job. Satan can make him sick, take his possessions, make him lose everything he has, but Satan cannot take Job's life. Satan agrees and thinks that taking all his possessions and his family will cause Job to curse God. Unfortunately for Satan, Job does not lose his faith or trust in God. In the end, God places the protection around Job again and gives him back everything Satan took.

In our lives, Satan, demons, and all powers of darkness can come against us, but God has a hedge of protection around us. As His children, He will not let things destroy us. We must trust and believe that God is protecting us. It is our responsibility to have faith and watch God work.

### Out of Nowhere

There are some days in life you try to forget. On the other hand, you try to remember the day as well. The day my daughter, Chasity, was accepted, in-person, at Lees-McRae College is one of those days for me. I try to remember the good things that happened that day, like the beautiful campus and the tasty ice cream after lunch. I try harder to forget the terrible things.

Early on the morning of October 24, 2020, my husband, my daughter, and I loaded into our Carolina blue Kia Sedona minivan. We had a one-way trip of a little more than two-and-a-half hours ahead of us. Chasity was touring Lees-McRae College that day. She had all her information in her hand to submit for an on-site admissions decision, and we left the house earlier than expected.

We backed the van out of our driveway a little before 7 AM. Check-in for the tour was at 10 AM, and we wanted to be sure we found the school and parking. What we did not know was that Lees-McRae is on the main street of Banner Elk, North Carolina. The address is “Main Street,” but we did not actually think that it would be right beside the buildings of downtown. You could walk to shops and restaurants from the school. This also meant that we could have parked anywhere in town to walk to the school. Luckily, we were able to park just across the street from the auditorium where the opening session was to be held.

The tour was amazing. The campus is quaint and beautiful. There is an enormous amount of history in the buildings and statues on the campus. The school was completing renovations on the Art building, and it was gorgeous. With my daughter being an Art major, we spent as much time in that building looking around, asking questions, and getting information as we could. After the tour, we met with the admissions department, and they took all of Chasity’s paperwork. They spent about twenty minutes looking over it, and then gave her an acceptance package on

the spot. Everything about the school and the tour was perfect. Traveling to the school was the issue.

As we left our neighborhood, I commented to Tony, my husband, about how much fog was out. It was a patchy fog, but when you entered the fog, it was hard to see the end of the hood of the van. Normally, when you drive on the interstate, fog is not an issue. All of the cars moving and passing cause the fog to lift on main roads. We figured this would be the case for that day as well.

There were some areas where there was little fog. Other places on the route, there were few patches of clearing in the fog. Before getting on I-77, in Mooresville, we stopped for breakfast, as we always do. After eating, Chasity and I went to sleep. I woke up a few times because of static on the radio or loud vehicles near us. Chasity slept through it all.

We changed from I-77 to 421. As we drove through Wilkes County, Tony was driving slowly and cautiously because the fog was not lifting. It was still thick, soupy, patchy fog. Even in the clearings, he was not gaining too much speed because they were so short lived. I woke up once, asked for the time, mentioned that I was afraid we were going to be late because of the fog, and went back to sleep. I do not know how long I was asleep before I was rudely awakened.

When my husband hits the brakes hard, it wakes me up. I felt him pushing the brakes strongly, I opened my eyes and saw him pulling the steering wheel to the left. I heard myself scream right before the bang. A large deer hit our car. I, obviously, was in the passenger seat, and Chasity was sitting behind me. The deer hit in a way that the entire left side of its body hit our van. Its head was just in front of my side mirror, and I saw it coming toward the windshield.

I think that may have been why I screamed. Everything happened so quickly, but I witnessed it in slow motion. The deer's head did not hit the window, mirror, or windshield. The

body of the deer damaged the right front quarter panel (lights, bumper, hood) and hit my door. The only damage to my door was deer fur left in the metal stripping.

After the collision, Tony started pulling over. He was going to park on the left shoulder of the road, near the median.

“Tony, no. Pull over to the other side.” I was crying and panicking all at once.

“Are you alright?” He asked.

“I think so. I’m not hurt physically. Scared. I’m scared.”

Tony crossed over to the right side of the road and pulled onto the shoulder there. The amazing thing during all of this is that there were no other cars coming behind us. No one else hit the deer. No one else hit us. It was just us and the deer.

By this time, Chasity was awake in the back seat. She said that the crash woke her up. I figured it was my scream. She said that she did not hear that and only saw the deer bounce off the car. Which it did; the deer hit the car, damaged it, and ran back into the woods on the side of the road.

Tony got out, still only a couple of cars passed on the road, and he checked the vehicle. He took a picture and showed it to me.

“What are we supposed to do now?” I asked.

“I don’t know. It’s just us. The deer is gone. Do we call the police?” He asked.

“Why wouldn’t you call the police?” Chasity asked.

“We probably should call them,” I confirmed.

Tony fumbled with his phone for a minute to get the call screen up, and as the dispatcher answered the phone, two deputy sheriffs’ cars pulled up. One parked behind us with his lights on and the other pulled in front of our van.

“Well, there are two officers here now. So, I don’t think I need anything else. Thank you,” Tony said to the dispatcher.

The two officers walked up to the vehicle. One officer asked for our information and registration. The other asked what happened.

“Are you both alright?” Officer 1 asked us.

“Yes, we are, and our daughter is in the backseat,” Tony answered.

“There are three of you? Do you need medical assistance?” Officer 1 asked.

“No, we’re all good,” I said. “I just can’t believe the deer hit us and ran back into the woods. I don’t know how badly it was hurt, but it just ran off.”

“We were sitting in a parking lot at the top of the hill over there,” Officer 2 pointed through the trees, “We heard the tires screeching and heard the hit. We thought we’d come down and check to see if someone needed anything.”

“All we need is to be able to drive,” I was still shaken, but I was annoyed as well. “We are headed to Banner Elk for a college tour with our daughter. Do you think we can still drive it?”

Both of the officers looked at the van. They bent over and looked under it. They tapped it and shook the side. Nothing was leaking or falling off of it.

Officer 2 said, “As long as you feel comfortable driving it, I think it’s safe. Nothing is falling off or leaking. There’s nothing puncturing the tire. I think you might be ok to drive it.”

We thanked the officers, but I never got their names. We drove off. There were very few spots of fog for the remainder of our drive to the school. About thirty minutes later, we arrived at Lees-McRae College in Banner Elk. We were still on time. We were greeted by the President of the college who was helping direct traffic on Main Street for the students and families to cross

safely. My daughter was cheered into the building by the cheerleaders. Once inside, we were met by a couple more cheerleaders and the mascot, Wily the Bobcat. Chasity took a picture with them in the photo station they had decorated. Then we spent the rest of the day listening to people talk about the school and show us the campus.

Looking back on that day, I try to remember the fabulous officers who arrived before we called 911. I try to recall the cheerleaders, the mascot, and the speakers of the day. I make myself think about the admissions counselors and the scenery on campus. I get that reminder through Facebook every year, too. I posted about the tour, buildings, food, and Chasity's acceptance. Unfortunately, on October 25, 2020, I posted about our deer encounter. Now, every year, Facebook reminds me of that as well.

I know that this was a miracle for us. I have friends who have completely lost control of their vehicles and sustained horrible injuries from colliding with a deer on the road. I have seen what a deer can do to a truck, much larger than my van. I also know that the fact that there were no other cars around to be involved in the incident is a miracle in itself. How is it possible that on a fall Saturday, when the leaves are changing and beautiful, there were no more vehicles on the road? God knew what He was doing. There is a reason we hit the deer and not someone before us or after us. God always has a reason, and I may never know it. I just know that God supplied a miracle for us that day.

## Saturday Morning Drive

Highway miles ahead and behind  
parallel the crawling creeks.  
Ageless antique oaks stand tall  
as we pass the mile markers  
on the Saturday morning ride.  
The flooding fog stretches  
on the road just ahead,  
as we drive towards our destination.  
Going toward the mountains  
in the early morning mists,  
we overhear arias  
of the birds flying near.  
Vehicles pass us,  
and fight through the fog  
as the dashing deer crosses.

Hesitation!

Consideration!

Brakes!

BAM!

The deer delivers  
a car side collision.  
The family is fine,  
but their transportation is totaled.

“Another in the Fire”—Hillsong United

“There is another in the fire  
Standing next to me  
There is another in the waters  
Holding back the seas  
And should I ever need reminding  
What power set me free  
There is a grave that holds no body  
And now that power lives in me “

The lyrics of this song speak to various times throughout the Bible that God protected His children. He still does that today. He keeps us from getting hurt badly when we are in car wrecks. He keeps us well instead of allowing us to be sick. He heals people who are lying on their death beds. God does not take all the problems and pains from us, but sometimes He gives us less of the pain or fewer problems. God protects His children, all the time.



## God Supplies

Exodus 16: God supplies everything Israel needs

- 11 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,  
12 I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel: speak unto them, saying, At even ye shall eat flesh, and in the morning ye shall be filled with bread; and ye shall know that I am the LORD your God.  
13 And it came to pass, that at even the quails came up, and covered the camp: and in the morning the dew lay round about the host.  
14 And when the dew that lay was gone up, behold, upon the face of the wilderness there lay a small round thing, as small as the hoar frost on the ground.  
15 And when the children of Israel saw it, they said one to another, It is manna: for they wist not what it was. And Moses said unto them, This is the bread which the LORD hath given you to eat.  
16 This is the thing which the LORD hath commanded, Gather of it every man according to his eating, an omer for every man, according to the number of your persons; take ye every man for them which are in his tents.

In Exodus 16, the children of Israel are wandering in the wilderness, and they are hungry. They are complaining to Moses and Aaron that God has brought them out of Egypt to die in the wilderness, and they should have stayed in captivity. God tells Moses to let the people know that He will supply manna for them daily. On the sixth day of the week, He will supply two days' worth of manna; this way they do not have to collect anything on the Sabbath day, the seventh day. God provided for Israel, and today He provides for us. He sees our needs, and sometimes our wants, and gives us what He knows is best for us.

### God Supplies

“Put that receipt down.” I remember my mom exclaiming this as I pulled a folded receipt from a brown, paper shopping bag on our kitchen table. It was not our receipt, but the stuff in the bags was for our family. I was just a curious kid, and I knew at that moment that I had better drop that receipt.

Sometimes God shows up in a grand gesture type of way. Other times, He shows up in the little things that matter so much. There are numerous times in my childhood I remember God being in the details. There is one particular time that stands out the most. Both of my parents worked. My dad drove a semi-truck or a school bus, worked as a substitute teacher, sold insurance, worked as the part-time minister of music at our church, or worked in a mill. My mom worked in a hosiery mill or a day care. For my friends at school, whose moms were school volunteers, class moms, or simply stay-at-home-moms, this was strange. My friends lived in big brick houses with six or eight bedrooms and multiple bathrooms. My family had a little white house, with chipping paint, two legitimate bedrooms, one bathroom, and a dining room we converted into a bedroom for Donnie, my brother.

My friends’ parents had mortgages; we rented. My friends had all the newest clothes and shoes from the mall; we were blessed if we could order from the Sears or JCPenney catalogue. Mostly, we shopped at K-Mart and Wal-Mart, once it opened nearby. Even as a child in school, I noticed the differences, but my friends never seemed to care; therefore, neither did I.

I vividly remember one year during the back-to-school season when the ends just were not meeting. My parents were struggling to get the things we needed for school, and they were trying to hide the struggle from us. About a week or so before school started, a man and a woman from a church I had never been to, showed up at our house. Their arms and car were full of brown paper shopping bags for my family. They had bags of school supplies. They had

groceries. I do not remember everything they had in the bags. I do remember helping to clear the kitchen table so they could put the bags there. After several trips to the car to unload, they visited for just a moment or two, said a prayer, and left. I have never seen them again. I sincerely believe God sends angels with brown paper bags full of the things you need, in order to strengthen your faith.

As I reached into the bag to pull some items from the bottom, I picked up the receipt. I began to open it, but as I did, my mom looked over at me and exclaimed, "Put that receipt down. Don't look at it."

At the time, I did not understand why I could not look at a folded piece of white paper, but later, I came to realize that the numbers on that paper were not for me to know. They were only to be known by the couple who brought the bags to our house and God.

I crumpled the receipt and tossed it into the trash can beside the kitchen table. I pulled the pens and pencils from the bottom of the bag and handed them to my mom. My mom's eyes filled with tears as we went through all the bags. Paper, pencils, pens, soups, noodles, macaroni and cheese, erasers, folders, and, best of all, a sparkly purple backpack.

In life, I have learned that when God provides, He pays attention to the details that matter most. In order to get my attention and prove that it was a God-thing, He included a new backpack just for me, in my favorite color. God showed His love for me that day through a small, to Him, miracle, and a sparkly purple backpack.

Conversation with God  
(A Poem in Two-voices)

Human	God
I get so lost in a maze of emotions. Every turn is a dead end.	I am Jehovah-Raah. I am your shepherd.
I become stuck in other people's lies. Struggling for freedom, their webs strangle me.	I am Jehovah Mekoddishkem. I am your sanctification.
I cannot provide for my family. My cupboards are bare and splintered.	I am Jehovah Jireh. I am your provider.
I am sick. My body no longer does as I command.	I am Jehovah Rapha. I am your healer.
I lose sleep to anxiety and worry. I toss and turn until my blankets are knots around me.	I am Jehovah Shalom. I am your peace.
	My child, I am Adonai and Elohim—the Lord, Master, and Father. I am El Shaddai, the Lord God Almighty. I am Jehovah Shammah. I am with you where you are now, where you were, and everywhere you will go. Never fear. Never fret. Always remember, I AM.

“Jireh”—Elevation Worship and Maverick City Music

It's more than you ask, think or imagine  
According to His power working in us  
It's more than enough  
It's more than you ask, think or imagine, oh yeah  
According to His power working in us  
It's more than enough

In this song, these two powerhouse groups combine to share that God is “Jireh, more than enough.” It illustrates how God works in the lives of His children on a daily basis. He never allows His children to go without the things we need. Sometimes, God even gives us the things we want as well. He is more than enough for everything we need, and He supplies all our needs.

## Pulling Together

Matthew 8:23-27: Jesus calms the storm

23 And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him.

24 And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep.

25 And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish.

26 And he saith unto them, 'Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?' Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.

27 But the men marvelled, saying, 'What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!'"

Jesus and his disciples were sailing away from a crowd of people. They had just ministered to the people, and they were traveling to their next location. Jesus, being the human He was, became tired and fell asleep on the boat. The winds and rains began to pound the boat, and the disciples were afraid. They called to Jesus to wake Him, and His first response to them was a question of their faith. Then, He stood in the boat and commanded the winds and waves to calm themselves. The disciples were amazed at the power Jesus possessed and queried among themselves what kind of man He was.

In our lives today, Jesus sometimes shows up and calms the storms. He controls the problems we are facing, but He also controls our thoughts and actions (or reactions) to things as well. There are times when Jesus takes complete control of a situation for us, and we have nothing left to do. However, there are times when He will urge us in a direction or speak to us about what we should do; then it is up to us to finish it.

When Jesus speaks, storms—problems, situations, thoughts—have to obey Him. He is the Son of God, and there is nothing He cannot do.

### Hurricane Hugo: Pulling Together

My parents put the three of us, my older brother, myself, and our one-year-old sister to bed around 10:00 PM, as normal. It was a Thursday, and we had school the next morning. The meteorologists were only calling for heavy rains, high winds, flash floods, and severe thunderstorms. We had gone to school in that weather before, and we had, of course, practiced the butt-in-the-air, head-in-the-floor pose for tornado drills. The news had warned viewers to prepare for power outages because of the winds and to expect downed trees and powerlines. Again, this was nothing new; North Carolina has a lot of severe thunderstorms in the summer, and we can handle that weather. Newspapers and news stations had declared that citizens should stockpile batteries, candles, matches and flashlights. We had shopped for bread, peanut butter, and jelly, as well. Basically, anything we could use in an emergency situation, we had bought, even charcoal for the grill.

We had an unbelievable false sense of security from the unseasonably warm, 80-degree weather. In Concord, North Carolina—about 20 miles north of Charlotte, we had been watching the weather stations and news broadcasts for two weeks. Hurricane Hugo had formed in the Atlantic, somewhere near Africa, and was set to make landfall on the United States coastline. On September 21, 1989, the meteorologists were still not completely sure where landfall would happen; it was just going to be between the Florida and North Carolina coasts. It was a Category 5 storm until it crossed Puerto Rico; it weakened somewhat, but by the time Hurricane Hugo made landfall in Charleston, South Carolina, around 11:30 PM, it was back to being a Category 4 storm.

I was only eleven years old, and I was oblivious to the fact that a hurricane could make it all the way to my house. I was content with believing that since we lived three hours or so from

the beach that I would never have to deal with a hurricane because I was smart enough not to go to the beach when there was a storm in the forecast. Our friends and family who lived at and near the beaches had, mostly, boarded up their houses with plywood, secured any loose items outside, and evacuated inland where it would—or should—be safer.

Around midnight, my mom came into my room and woke me. She handed me a black trash bag, and said, “Put your clothes in here, in case we need to evacuate.”

“Evacuate? Where? Why?” I questioned.

“We may have to leave if the storm gets too bad,” was her response.

“Mom, there is no storm. Are you dreaming?”

“No, the news said the hurricane made landfall and is not slowing down. It could make it here. We have to be ready.”

“Mom, we live in Concord. There are no beaches here. We’re fine. Go to sleep,” I protested.

About that time, my dad came into the room. He began tossing my clothes into the bag for me since I was not doing as I was asked. We packed almost every stitch of clothes I owned into trash bags. I even put my stuffed animals, blankets, and pillows in a separate bag. Inside the top of that one, I placed my burgundy, suede leather Bible with gold lettering for *Holy Bible* and my name—*Leslie Rene’ Parker*.

Once we had the clothes packed, we moved the bags to my parents’ bedroom and stacked everyone’s bags together. Donnie, my older brother, was already sleeping in his bed again. Unfortunately, my room had double windows, so my mom put me and Lisa, my baby sister, in Donnie’s room as well. Dad and Mom stayed in the living room watching the news and weather stations, and around 3:00 AM, Hurricane Hugo hit Concord.



For several hours, 80-90 mph winds shook our 100-year-old house. Outside our “storm windows” chaos was curling. As the sun rose, the storm continued raging. We watched bushes, chairs, trash, and trashcans fly down the street. Not long after sunrise, the storm stopped. The winds became a gentle breeze, and the skies were a grayish-Carolina blue. Except for the damage around us, no one would know that the storm had just ravaged the area.

My parents allowed us time to walk outside to see the damage in our yard, mostly some downed limbs from our pecan trees. I remember asking my parents, “If the storm is over, why aren’t we going to school?”

My dad answered with, “This is just the eye of the storm.”

I had no idea what he meant, but when my dad spoke with his “please stop asking questions” tone, I stopped. I did not ask him what the eye of the storm was. I retreated to the house with my mom and my siblings and waited, for what I did not know.

When the eye passed, the winds reversed. Trees that had been bent to the right now bent left. Powerlines that folded to the north folded south. Everything was reversed, and everything was worse. Nature’s fury exploded outside my windows. Trees and powerlines snapped, and transformers popped. Loose objects, in almost any size, became projectiles in the sheer force of the winds. In total, Hugo pelted Concord with hurricane force winds and torrential rains for five hours or so. At some point in those tumultuous hours after the eye passed, we lost power. Our entire street lost power. About 85% of Concord lost power. The storm ended, but that was only the beginning.

Although we did not have power, we still had phone service. I still giggle at this because if I lose power now, I lose my landline. Yes, I still have a landline. Back in 1989, everyone had a landline, and it was most likely not a cordless phone. Our singular phone that connected to our

landline was on the wall in my brother's bedroom. His bedroom had formally been the dining room, but my parents had converted it to his room so that he and I did not have to share. We called a few friends and family members to check on them to see who needed help. Each call was basically the same:

“Hi! Are you guys okay?”

“Do you have any damage that needs to be taken care of immediately?”

“Do you need any supplies?”

“Do you have food, water, and power?”

Then we would call the next person.

The first call was to my great-grandmother who lived down the street from us. She was fine, but she did not have power. There was nothing we could do about that because we were powerless as well.

The second call was to my mom's parents. They lived across town. They, too, were without power, and they had some damage to their plants, trees, and garden.

The third call, as I remember, was to my dad's parents. They lived behind my great-grandmother on Howerton Avenue which runs parallel to Cabarrus Avenue (our street). I could walk to my grandparents' and my great-grandparents' houses from my house. Grandmother and Papaw were fine as well. However, they did have power. Their house was on a separate power grid from ours and Momma Hazel's (my great-grandmother's) house. This was good news. Now, we could take our cold stuff from our freezers and refrigerator to their house, and it would keep. This also meant that we would not have to go to a laundromat to do our laundry.

About the time we finished our calls, there was a knock at the door. Our pastor, Mike Bare, and his sons, Jason and Phillip, were making their rounds checking on the members of the

congregation. Naturally, our house was one of the first stops because he knew that if he came here, Dad would go with him to check on others. Dad did.

My grandparents, Dad's parents, had a two-bedroom, one bathroom house. For a few days, there were seven of us living there. It was a challenge; schedules collided. Bathroom use was crazy. However, it was only temporary, and we were able return home only a couple of days later. I think that being on the same power grid as the Concord Police Department was a huge factor in how quickly our house was relit.

It was over a week before all the schools in the district were able to clear the damage and restore power. I was in middle school, sixth grade. The school had previously been the high school, and part of it was below ground. Anytime there were more than a couple of inches of rain or snow, the lower level would flood. There are times when it still does, from what I understand. They had to do a deep clean in those underground hallways so that no mold would form. However, no matter how many times they deep clean those hallways, there is mold. There was mold, and there always will be mold.

All around town, trees were on cars and houses. Buildings were crushed. Church steeples lay in the parking lots instead of standing tall on the buildings. Just down the street from my house, one of the local AME Zion churches lost half of their building. The sanctuary was completely destroyed, but the classrooms were salvageable. Once the debris was cleared and the back portion of the building was declared safe, the parishioners gathered in the small classrooms and meeting rooms. Even with only half a building, every Sunday, the church parking lot was full. Over the next few months, the church members held yard sales and bake sales. The community gave donations, and right about the one-year anniversary of Hurricane Hugo, the church broke ground on their current location, and it is beautiful.

The church I attended at the time is the church I still attend. Our church roof was moved six inches. The church building is not small. If you know what to look for, you can see where the roof was moved and repaired afterwards. If you have a bird's-eye-view of the property, you can see how the front of the building and the back, the original part of the church, are not lined up one hundred percent correctly. This year will be 32 years, and the church has never had a roof problem from the damage.

As clean up from Hurricane Hugo continued, men, women, and children all rolled up our sleeves and worked to get back to normal. As the men would cut trees into pieces with their chainsaws, the women and children would gather them and make stacks by the road. We raked leaves and picked up debris from yards, and we all did it for each other. No one really had to ask for help; we just did it. It was what was needed. Some of those stacks of debris stayed by the road until November, if I remember correctly because there was so much to collect. The trucks could only get to a few places a day, and they would have several loads from one small area.

Those of us who were in the area when Hurricane Hugo made its debut remember it fondly and painfully. I remember the inconveniences of staying with family, having no power, and not getting to see friends. I also remember the community, how everyone pulled together to help others, and how no one was alone or without anything they needed. The one lesson I will always carry with me from Hurricane Hugo is that my hometown has power and pulls together during the good times and the bad times.

September 22, 1989

It seems like a lifetime ago.  
I watched it with my own eyes.  
Everything happened so quickly  
that it seemed like slow motion.

The weather alert came through the television.  
Mom woke us all up.  
What we witnessed  
was the Hand of God.

The eye passed over.  
Winds switched directions.  
So many things going on  
and everything stopped.

Sounds of nature's fury exploded.  
Loose objects became projectiles.  
What we watched on television for two weeks  
was now at our front doors.

The Aftermath:

trees on houses and power lines  
    uprooted from the ground  
widespread power outages  
    eighty-five percent of the town  
people huddled in houses  
    with their families in fear  
our church roof moved six inches  
    can still see it from above  
schools closed for more than a week  
    no power  
    some flooding  
    a lot of damage  
churches in town  
    one ripped in half  
    several steeples blown off

Lessons Learned:

know where everything important is  
    so you can pack quickly  
never say never  
    a hurricane had never been this far  
    thought it would never come

“In the Eye of the Storm”—Ryan Stevenson

“In the eye of the storm  
You remain in control  
And in the middle of the war  
You guard my soul  
You alone are the anchor  
When my sails are torn  
Your love surrounds me  
In the eye of the storm.”

These are the opening lines of the song, and they completely show what God is doing in the storms of our lives. He is working, even when we do not see it. He is moving when we cannot see it. God is there in all the storms and trials and fires we face.

At the time, when I was ten years old and experiencing a hurricane outside my window, I did not realize how much God was controlling it. In my adolescent brain, it was scary and not controllable at all. Looking back now, I can see that what I watched was God’s finger moving on land. Everything with which it made direct contact was damaged or destroyed, but anything that was only on the boundaries was wind-blown and wet from rain. God controls the storms in life, and I just need to pay attention so I will remain safe with Him in every storm.

## Family

Psalm 27:1: Whom shall I fear

1 The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life;  
of whom shall I be afraid?

I have many fears. As the following story will show, one of them is dogs. My fear of dogs started a long time ago, when I was eight and bitten by a Chihuahua. Every time I tell people this, they laugh. I know it sounds funny that I am terrified of all dogs because of one little, yippy Chihuahua when I was a kid. I am. I do not mind telling people that, and I do everything I can to avoid all dogs.

However, this verse says I do not have to be afraid. Everyone is afraid of something, sometimes a lot of things. I know that God could remove my fear of dogs, but most of time, I feel like that is something piddly, and I should not “bother” Him with it. God would not be bothered if I asked Him to remove my fear. But, I believe that sometimes God will use something we fear to help us do what He needs us to do.

The Psalmist says that we do not have to fear. If we are facing something fearful, we can call on the name of Jesus, and He will remove the fear and give us the power we need to face whatever is coming.

### Discovering Papaw

My fear of dogs is real and debilitating. My fear of dogs began when I was eight years old, and my family and I were visiting a friend's house. Her Chihuahua had recently had puppies, and we were visiting to see them. The momma Chihuahua was being overly protective of the pups, so our friend put her in another room. Unfortunately, just as I was bending over to pet one of the puppies, our friend's husband, who had just arrived home from work, went into their bedroom and the momma came running out. Before I could draw my arm back, she had latched on to my wrist to protect her babies.

I started screaming like someone was trying to kill me. My parents were pulling on me to get me away from the box of puppies, and our friend was pulling on the momma dog to get her off of me. Luckily for me, it only left superficial teeth marks on my wrist.

My fear of dogs is so intense that when I hear a dog barking, I freeze up. After hearing it a couple of times, I can tell you in which direction the sound is coming. I can also, especially in a neighborhood, tell which house or yard the bark is near, typically within one house. I can tell if the dog is inside or outside. If the dog is outside, I can tell if it is running in a fence or on a chain. My family sometimes thinks that it is funny that I am afraid, but they do not tease me about it as much anymore.

I remember one time when my grandmother was dropping me off at home after spending the day with her that I heard a dog barking when I opened the car door. I was in the backseat of my grandparents' four-door Oldsmobile. I was sitting in the back seat on the passenger side because my house was on that side of the street. Grandmother always pulled up in front of the house, and I jumped out and ran up the three concrete stairs to the front porch. Not this time! I slammed the door, locked it, and jumped into the back window area. The car was one of those



that had the flat area behind the back seat headrest for speakers, and the window angled in over the top of them. I wedged myself in the back window of the Oldsmobile.

I started crying, and Grandmother started blowing the horn. Reluctantly, one of my parents came out to get me. I never saw the dog, but I did get to walk in with a parental escort. I am sure that my parent thought I was being overly dramatic but came to rescue me.

Most of my friends had dogs. In order to be able to have sleepovers in elementary, middle, and high school, they came to my house. Until I was in high school, I used my allergies as an excuse, but I finally told a few friends. They were supportive, but they still laughed at me every now and then.

My brother has always harassed me about my fear, and when we were younger, he would terrorize me and chase me while either pretending to be a dog or pretending there was a dog behind him. That is how I ended up with seven stitches on Easter Sunday when I was eight. Our family was at Grandmother and Papaw's house; that is where we went most Sunday afternoons. Every Easter we went there for the traditional ham and sides, and then we would do egg hunts in the backyard. On this particular Easter, my brother, Donnie, and I were playing in the back yard. The neighbor's medium-sized dog, which was on a leash on the far side of the neighbor's yard, barked a few times. Without any warning, Donnie ran past me and yelled "Dog!" I thought the dog had broken its chain.

I took off running up the asphalt driveway with so many cracks I think Papaw had to mow it. The house was an old Cannon Mills supervisor's house. The porch had a wood floor, a red porch swing, some rusted metal lawn chairs that used to glide, and white rails around it. The rails were actually two-by-fours, I think, or maybe one-by-fours. There were two of these on going around the boundary of the porch. My brother and I would always step up on the part of

the porch floor that came to the outside of the railing behind the porch swing, grab the wooden shutter on the window, and throw our leg over, like climbing a short fence, and jump onto the porch. Grandmother did not like for us to do it, but she never fussed at us. That Easter Sunday was the last time I did it.

When I grabbed for the shutter, I completely missed it. My hand landed on the porch swing, pushed it forward, and as I tried to grab on to something, anything, I fell onto the floor of the porch. The swing slammed into the house. Unfortunately for my left knee, there was nail head sticking up. It cut my knee in a T-shape. My parents and Grandmother heard the collision and ran to the porch. My dad grabbed me off the floor and carried me inside the house. Grandmother grabbed some towels because my leg was bleeding profusely. As quickly as I could tell them what happened and that my knee was the only thing hurting, my parents loaded me into the car and drove me to the emergency room. The best thing about having to get stitches was that the doctor asked me what color I wanted; I chose Carolina Blue.

After April 1, 2020, I can absolutely, without a doubt say that I am glad that I am afraid of dogs. My story of April Fool's Day 2020 actually started on March 31. My dad is an only child, and his mom passed away in 2010. His dad, Papaw, had been living alone all that time. Until the end of March 2020, only Papaw had keys to his house. Finally, my parents asked Papaw for a key to his house, and Papaw had four new keys made. Dad and Mom each took one, and they put one on the shelf at their house so if any of Papaw's grandkids or great grandkids needed access. Then on March 31, 2020, Mom gave me a key. There were times that I would go to Papaw's house and do things for my parents because they could not get down there or because it was hard for them to get up the stairs since they have gotten older. Before this, I had to wait until Papaw was home to do things at his house.

Papaw had worked at Cannon Mills/Fieldcrest Cannon for decades. When they closed for good, he was given his retirement, but he was bored sitting at home, so he found a job working part-time at a farm. He mucked the stalls, brushed the horses, and took care of yard work. Every day between noon and one PM, Papaw would call my mom. He would check on her, have her call doctors for him, or just say that he was off work and heading home. In the evenings, Mom would call him again to make sure he did not need anything for that night or the following day and remind him of any appointments he had or medicines he needed to pick up.

On Monday, March 30, Papaw was not feeling well, so he called his boss to let him know that he was going to take the day off. His boss told him to take the week off and that he would see Papaw on Monday. Papaw called mom and let her know, and on March 31, he asked her to call his doctor. The doctor did a phone visit with him since we were in the beginning stages of COVID-19, and he did not want Papaw in the office if he did not absolutely have to come in. The doctor said that it sounded like Papaw had a kidney infection and called in some medications. Donnie and his wife, Mary, took some food to Papaw so he would not have to go out for anything for a couple of days.

On April 1, 2020, around 1:30 PM, Mom called me.

“Hey, what are you doing?”

“I’m just sitting here watching television and waiting on Chasity to get out of class.” My daughter, who is homeschooled, was taking online classes at Rowan-Cabarrus Community College. She was in class for a couple of hours on Mondays and Wednesdays.

“I’ve been trying to get Papaw to answer the phone. How long would it take for you to get down to his house?”

“Long enough for me to slide on shoes and drive. Maybe fifteen minutes. Do I need to go down there?”

“If you don’t mind. He is probably outside or down at the flat. If he is down there, his phone is off.”

“Ok. I’ll call you when I find him.”

On the way to Papaw’s house, my mind starts racing to all the horrible things I could find. *His house is not in a great area of town, could someone have broken in and hurt him? Did he fall asleep on the porch again? What are the steps for CPR? Do I remember them? Why am I the one that is going? Donnie isn’t working because school is virtual. He could have driven down there. He lives closer than I do.* Then I remembered all the times Papaw had done things for me and focused on driving to check on him.

When I arrived at his house, Papaw’s El Camino was in the carport. I called his cell phone. No answer. I called the house phone. Answering machine.

“Papaw, it’s Leslie. I’m outside. The neighbor’s dog is out here too. He’s not on a leash. Can you come out and let me in?”

I called both phones four or five times each, then I called Mom.

“I guess I’m going to get over my fear of dogs today.”

“Why?”

“The neighbor’s little brown and white yipper mutt came running up to my tires as I drove in.”

“Just stay in the car. I’ll call Donnie. He will come down there.”

As I waited for my brother, the little dog disappeared. However, my fear did not, and I was not about to get out of my car without my brother there to save me. About ten minutes later,

my brother and my youngest nephew, Maven, arrived. As soon as they parked, I jumped out; I knew I was safe. I ran onto the porch and looked in the window.

Donnie was only about five steps behind, but I yelled, "He's in his chair. It looks like he's asleep."

We banged on the door, rang the doorbell, and knocked on the windows. Nothing.

"Leslie, this doesn't look good."

"I have a key. Mom gave it to me last night. We can go in."

Papaw had one of those old, white, metal storm doors that is solid on the bottom, but the top can be a window (plexiglass) or a screen. He had the window in, and the storm door was locked. Donnie, who is 6' 3" and muscular, shouldered in on the window and knocked it loose. He unlatched the door, and I unlocked the wooden front door with my key.

"Oh God no! God not this please!"

"Donnie, what are we supposed to do?"

"Call Mom."

I called Mom who told me to call 9-1-1. Papaw's house sits in the middle of two fire stations, each only about two miles away. When either of them turns on the sirens, you can hear it. On that day, it seemed like those two miles were a million; it felt like forever waiting on the emergency personnel to arrive.

"Ma'am. I can walk you through CPR. Can you lie him down flat?" The voice of the dispatcher was amazingly calm, but I was not.

"Lady, I know CPR, but Papaw's hand is cold. He's not breathing. Please tell the drivers to hurry. We can't lose Papaw."

"Ma'am. I understand. You said he is cold?"

“Yes. His hand is cold.”

“Help is on the way.”

“I don’t hear them. I should hear them. Never mind, I see them. I am sorry for yelling.

Thank you. This just can’t be happening.”

I opened the door, and yelled, “Donnie, they are here!”

Donnie shoved the door open and made way for the emergency workers to get in. As they disembarked from the two firetrucks, four police cars, and the ambulance, they pulled out their gear and pulled on their masks. The first person to go in the house was a short man, older than me, but probably not by much. He was in the house only a couple of minutes before he came out and sent the ambulance away. A couple of the police officers did a check of the house to be sure there was no foul play, and then they had what seemed like a million questions.

April 1, 2020 was one of the rare times that I was glad to be afraid of dogs. That fear saved me from entering Papaw’s house to find that he had passed away. Now, a year later, I think that God sent that dog as an angel to protect me from going in alone.

## Family Is

Family is a garden;  
each plant serves a specific purpose.

Family is a toolbox;  
every tool has a special job.

Family is a box of chocolates—  
some sweet, some salty, some nutty.

Family is a Spring bouquet—  
multicolored and beautiful.

Family is a house;  
each generation builds on the support  
and foundation of the previous ones.

Family is a closet of clothes—  
some tall, some short,  
some soft, some scratchy.

Family is a collection of old 45s—  
some loud, some soft.

Family is a menagerie of animals,  
a zoo, if you will,  
some wild, some tame.

Family is a car show—  
some shiny and new,  
some antiques.

Family is a circle;  
no matter where they are or  
what they are doing,  
they are always connected.

“Whom Shall I Fear? (God of Angel Armies)”—Chris Tomlin

“I know who goes before me  
I know who stands behind  
The God of angel armies  
Is always by my side  
The one who reigns forever  
He is a friend of mine  
The God of angel armies  
Is always by my side”

Knowing who is in front of me and who stands behind me allows me to stand in confidence and not in fear. I know that God is fighting for me, and I no longer have to be a prisoner of fear. Fear can be debilitating; I know. However, God is the conqueror of fear, and He will stand in the gap to ensure my safety against all enemies.



## House and Home

Psalm 23—God provides protection

- 1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
- 2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.
- 3 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
- 4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
- 5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
- 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

In the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, David writes of the protection of God. God is a shepherd who provides for His children. He protects them from the evils that will come. As His children, we need to know that when trouble comes, God will protect us. We may be in the scariest place in our lives, but God is beside us. He will not lead us to a place He has never been or will not go with us. Trust in the Lord to provide the protection needed from the snares of darkness. God will provide all we need. He will ensure that nothing can harm us.

## Tree vs. Truck

In our family, the month of May is completely packed with events and things, sometimes trips. There are four, maybe five, birthdays. Mother's Day is always in there. My husband and I celebrate our wedding anniversary during this time as well. With as many people as we have in our family, there is some of graduation celebration during this time, too. However, May 2017, made things a little more interesting.

I talk to my parents six or eight times a day, either in texts or on the phone. Normally, the communication is between my mother and me, but every now and then Dad will call. When Dad calls, I know that I need to pick up quickly because he usually has something to say that is important. When my phone rang that day, I was perplexed. I had spoken with Mom about ten minutes prior, and everything was fine.

My dad and I have a strange relationship. The problem is that we are very much alike, and so we do things to annoy one another. When I answered the phone, I did what I always do.

"What do you want? I just talked to Mom."

"I think a tree just fell at the house." He seemed confused, but so was I.

"What do you mean? Why do you think a tree fell at the house?"

"We heard a loud bang. Mom went to the door and looked. There is a tree laying by the carport." He did not sound like he was joking with me, but I can never be positive.

"So, do you want me to come climb the tree? What do you want me to do about it?" I was attempting to see if he was kidding or if a tree really fell.

"I don't think you want to climb it. It's laying on my truck."

"Dad! Are you kidding me? Is there really a tree down at your house?" I was starting to worry. Dad would never joke about something messing up his truck.

“Yes. A tree fell. It’s on my truck.”

“I’ll be right there.” I grabbed my purse, keys, and shoes and headed to the car.

Once I got in the car, I remembered that I should check on my parents. I called the house phone, but no one answered. That was strange. If a tree fell on the truck, they could not go anywhere. I called Mom’s cell phone.

“Hello?” She seemed a little more upset than Dad was.

“Are you and Dad ok? Did the tree hit the house? Is the truck broken?”

“We are fine, I think. It only hit the corner of the house. We don’t have power. I can’t tell how bad the truck is. Wait. The neighbor is coming. I’ll talk to you in a minute.” She hung up before I could say goodbye or anything else.

When I pulled into the driveway of their house, fewer than ten minutes later, I saw the tree. It was only part of a tree, but it was big. The remainder of the tree, an even bigger part, was still standing in the backyard. Now that this piece was lying on the ground, we could tell that it was dead and should have been managed much sooner.

Mom and Dad were standing in their carport talking to the neighbor who lives diagonally behind them. She and her husband, whose names I still can never remember, were in the backyard when they heard the crash. They looked over and saw the tree on the ground. While I was talking to Mom on the phone, he came over to check on them. Then, he returned home, got his chainsaw, and began cutting the tree so that we could move it from the truck.

I called Tony, my husband, and told him what was going on. He came there straight from work to help move pieces from the truck. The neighbor was cutting and moving pieces as quickly as he could, but the tree was massive.

After surveying the yard, house, and truck, we determined that the damage could have been considerably worse. The tree, when it fell, clipped the back corner of the house. The only thing at that corner was a power line and the cable line. Therefore, Mom and Dad had no power source for the house. The line was not connected. The tree did not hit any windows on the house or the truck. The leaves from the top of the tree were the only thing touching the windshield of the truck.

For those who are curious, Mom and Dad only parked the truck, a silver 2001 Dodge Ram, in the carport on the weekends. During the week, Mom had Papaw's Cadillac because he did not want it to stay at his house while he worked during the week. Mom drove it to work, and on Fridays, she would take it back to Papaw for him to drive on the weekends. They had been doing this for a couple of years, and the truck lived on the outside of the carport, just on the edge of the driveway during the week. If this had happened on a Friday afternoon, it would have landed on the Cadillac instead of the truck, and it would have crushed the car.

That is the first part of the miracle. The second part is that the tree only clipped the corner of the house knocking out the power and cable. If the tree had fallen a foot to the left, it would have landed on the laundry room and the carport. If it had fallen six feet to the left, my parents kitchen and dining room would have been destroyed.

We count our blessings and collect our miracles. My parents' truck was totaled, but they could drive it with a salvage title. They did that for a little bit, but then one day a man drove by asking if they wanted to sell it. He learned about the title and did not care. He paid them cash for a truck that they could not get complete insurance coverage for any longer.

Mom and Dad lost the food in the refrigerator and freezer. They had to stay in a hotel for two or three nights until the power company and cable company could come reconnect the lines to the house. That was the biggest loss in all of this, food; it is replaceable.

When bad things happen, my parents always ask, “Are you ok?” When I answer to the affirmative, they say, “Things can be replaced. You can’t.”

Since this happened, my parents have had someone look at the rest of the tree to see if it needs to come down. It does not. The man told them that it was healthy enough to stay standing.

Sometimes that is how things happen. Something breaks, or a piece of it does, and when we fix it or look at the part that left, it is fine and we can still use it. God blessed our family that day in May 2017. It could have been so much worse when the tree fell, but God saw fit to protect my parents and their house, where we do all the family dinners and gatherings. God was in the miracle-working business for our family that afternoon, and we are so thankful.

House and Home

Domiciles of delight  
Abodes of abundance  
Cottages of comfort  
Dwellings of determination  
Lodgings of love  
Shelters of safety  
Habitations of healing

Delight and disappointment  
Abundance and absence  
Comfort and calamity  
Determination and doubt  
Love and loss  
Safety and sorrow  
Healing and heartache

Hands make a house.  
Hearts make a home.

“Household of Faith”—Steve Green

“We'll build a household of faith  
And together we can make  
And when the strong wind blows  
It won't fall down  
As one in Him will grow  
And the whole world will know/”

“Household of Faith” is often viewed as a wedding song. It can be, and I included it in my ceremony. The message of the song is clear. The family is growing stronger as they grow closer to the Lord. No matter what comes their way, they will be able to persist and continue because of the strength of their faith and the protection of God.

My parents built a household of faith for our family, and, because of that, God has protected us and them many times. Just a few years ago, He protected their house when a tree in their yard fell. It could have damaged so much more than it did, but God laid the tree down exactly where He wanted it.

As Christians, we have to build a home of faith for our families so when the tough times come, we know that God will see us through them. No matter the circumstances, God is faithful to His children and will protect us.

## Adopting Christmas

Exodus 2: 1-10: Moses is adopted

- 1 And there went a man of the house of Levi, and took to wife a daughter of Levi.
- 2 And the woman conceived, and bare a son: and when she saw him that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months.
- 3 And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein; and she laid it in the flags by the river's brink.
- 4 And his sister stood afar off, to wit what would be done to him.
- 5 And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to wash herself at the river; and her maidens walked along by the river's side; and when she saw the ark among the flags, she sent her maid to fetch it.
- 6 And when she had opened it, she saw the child: and, behold, the babe wept. And she had compassion on him, and said, This is one of the Hebrews' children.
- 7 Then said his sister to Pharaoh's daughter, Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee?
- 8 And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, Go. And the maid went and called the child's mother.
- 9 And Pharaoh's daughter said unto her, Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages. And the woman took the child, and nursed it.
- 10 And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses: and she said, Because I drew him out of the water.

Moses' mother, a Levite woman of the house of Israel, could not keep her son in her home for an extended period of time. Those in power had issued a decree that males would be killed, and she did not want this for her son. She and her daughter, Miriam, crafted a basket and put Moses in it and set him afloat on the Nile River. The basket drifted nearby where Pharaoh's daughter was bathing in the Nile. She gathered the basket and decided in an instant to keep Moses and raise him. Miriam offered the services of their mother as a nurse for Moses. This allowed Moses to be in the house of his family while he was growing, until a certain age. Many parents and children today face circumstances beyond their control. The children must be removed from the household for myriad reasons. There are people, like my sister, who have opened their homes and hearts to these children. Like Pharaoh's daughter, they adopt these children into their families and raise them as their own.



### Adopting Christmas

My sister adopted Christmas. That may sound like a strange thing to say, but the year that she adopted her middle daughter, she made Christmas more special for all of us.

Almost fourteen years ago, on July 19, 2008, my sister, Lisa, walked down the aisle. She married a man that our family loved and who loved her. Lisa and this man (whom we shall not name) were married for about five years when Brianna came along. Brianna is my sister's middle daughter. She is now eleven, but at the time, she was just over a year old. Lisa and her husband had become foster parents just so they would be able to bring Brianna into their home on a more permanent basis.

Brianna had been in other foster care placements, but when my sister officially met her, she was with my sister's friend, who also happened to be the director of the daycare where my sister worked. After taking all the classes, completing numerous interviews and home studies, and getting everything ready for Brianna to come into the home, it was finally time. She was placed in Lisa's care in the summer of 2013.

The three of them were a cute, happy little family. They were always with the extended family for all our birthday parties and dinners, and, yes, we have a lot of them. I fell in love with Brianna, and I am not typically a "baby person." Brianna stole all our hearts from the very beginning.

On October 21, 2013, Lisa got a call from the Department of Health and Human Services, the agency in charge of placing children in foster care homes. She was asked if they would be willing to take a sibling set. It was two girls—a middle-schooler and an infant. Lisa talked it over, quickly, with her husband, and they agreed to take the placement. Later that evening, the

family of three became a family of five; Alisa and Autumn arrived and almost doubled the family.

Shortly after the arrival of Alisa (teenager) and Autumn (infant), we discovered the Lisa's husband "forgot" that he was supposed to stop dating when he got married. By this time, he and Lisa had already taken Legal Guardianship of Brianna. He and Lisa separated, and in our state, you must live separately for at least a year before you can file for an actual divorce. Lisa and the three girls moved to a different house. Lisa worked full-time and had three girls. She also had an amazing support system; the entire family did everything we could to help her. We picked the oldest up from school, took her to basketball try-outs, and kept the younger two while she worked late hours at the daycare.

The soon-to-be ex-husband decided that he no longer wanted to be a Legal Guardian of Brianna, so Lisa got everything taken care of to have his name removed from all of Brianna's paperwork. He was no longer able to see, talk to, or have any claim to Brianna, but he did not show that he wanted to, either.

During all of this, Lisa worked, went to court for all three girls, handled home visits, parent visits, school, daycare, and life. Alisa and Autumn also have two other siblings, whose ages fall between them, a brother and a sister. They were with Lisa's friend, who at one time had Brianna. They were able to get the siblings together for things like birthdays, holidays, weekends, and just for fun. They could do sleep overs and play dates. It was great that they were together like this because the siblings could still bond.

On May 22, 2015, Lisa's divorce was finalized. The only reason she would be in court now would be family court for the girls. Lisa already had Legal Guardianship of Brianna, but that did not completely terminate the rights of her parents, and that meant that there would be

more court dates. Alisa and Autumn's parents had separated, and that caused them—and the other two siblings—to have multiple parental visits. Eventually, one parent's rights were terminated. That limited the visits to only the other parent.

For almost five years, Lisa, and the foster family who took the other siblings as a long-term placement, were in and out of family court. The parent who still had rights earned visits and wanted reunification. Then the parent lost visitation because of non-compliance to court requirements. The parent gained visitation back, and the four siblings and the foster parents were in this yo-yo of emotions and plans.

Finally, on August 31, 2018, after having Alisa and Autumn in her home for four years and ten months, Lisa officially adopted the two girls. The other family adopted their siblings. The two families do not live in the same city, but they live close enough that they can still get together for special occasions. The four of them are still close, and Brianna loves all four of them like her own siblings.

Lisa's support system continued to grow through this time. In March 2017, she met Spencer Lomax. He is amazing with Lisa and with all three girls. He supported Lisa through the difficulties of adopting Alisa and Autumn. He comforted her as she cried when she thought the court was going to take them away. He helped her remain strong as she fought to keep the girls in her home, safe and secure.

In March 2019, Spencer planned an elaborate engagement for Lisa. He put flower petals in a path from the front door to a heart in the middle of the living room. He made a sign for each of the girls to hold asking "Will you—Marry—Me?" He planned it so that someone would be there to record it, and then they posted the video on Facebook for the family.

The rest of that year, Lisa continued the fight to move from Legal Guardian to Mom for Brianna. Part of the problem was the foster care system, but another issue was that Brianna's family no longer lives in the same state as we do. Lisa sat down with Brianna's birth mom and grandmother to tell them that she wanted to adopt Brianna; they agreed. That is, they agreed until it started becoming a reality for them. Her mom's rights had to be terminated by the court because she did not relinquish them, unfortunately.

Lisa completed all of her paperwork. She submitted it and hoped for the best. Her social worker was in contact with the court, and the social worker was telling her that it would be January 2020 at the earliest before she would get results from the paperwork.

Our family started praying, not that we had not been praying for the entire situation. We had been praying through the situation with Alisa and Autumn. We worried, cried, and prayed when we thought they may have to go back to their birth home. We praised when we found out that they would become Parkers forever and never have to leave.

We knew that, according to the court system, there was no way Brianna would be adopted before the new year. We prayed. As a family, we believed God could adjust the timeline and make it possible through the court.

I should preface this next part by saying that my sister is always late to everything. If you want her to arrive on-time you have to tell her that you are starting thirty minutes (at least) earlier than you plan to start. Even then, she *may* still be late. On December 25, 2019, Lisa, Spencer, and the girls were living within walking distance to our parents' house. They had been living there for a while and walked, biked, or rode scooters over several times. I was living across town. I should have been the last person to arrive at our family Christmas dinner just because of the distance from my house to our parents' house.

We have an app on our phones that tells where other members of our family are, so if they ever need us. I kept checking the app as Tony drove us across town to my parents' house, and I was getting frustrated that Lisa and her crew were still not at the dinner yet. When I got there, Mom texted Lisa, and a couple of minutes later, she called our brother, Donnie, on FaceTime. I thought it was strange that we were all standing in the dining room waiting by the door for Lisa and her family, but it was even stranger that Mom had called Donnie. Donnie was at home sick and did not want to spread it, so he was on the phone with us.

I saw Lisa's car pull into the driveway. I started to put my shoes on and head out to help carry in anything they had. My mom tapped my shoulder and stopped me. I backed away from the door and bumped into Dad and his walker. Now I knew something was up because Dad never stood in the dining room with the crowd; he was usually in his recliner watching television.

The door opened, and Brianna was standing in front of my sister in a long-sleeved red shirt. The metallic gold print on the front caught my attention. As I read the shirt, I fell on my knees and grabbed Brianna; I was in tears. Her shirt read "Officially a Parker." I looked at my sister and said, "Really?" Lisa just nodded with tears in her eyes.

Christmas 2019 is one of the best Christmases ever. I found out, after I finally released Brianna to be able to hug other people, that the adoption paperwork had become official on December 20, 2019, but Lisa—and my parents—decided to plan this out to tell the family.

Lisa and Spencer got married on March 21, 2020, and just recently celebrated their two-year anniversary. In May of this year, 2022, they will welcome a little boy into the family. I am so excited for them. However, the best thing ever was when my sister adopted Christmas.

## Adapting to Adoption

*Adapt*: to make suitable to conditions;  
to adjust oneself to the environment.  
No matter the conditions?  
Even toxic environments?

*Adopt*: to take as one's own;  
to take on responsibility of raising.  
No matter the background?  
Even troublesome children?

*Adopt* and *adapt*  
One letter apart.  
Sometimes synonyms;  
more often corequisites.

*Adapt*: alter oneself to be something else;  
modify behaviors;  
conform to expectations;  
change for others;  
grow used to environment.

*Adopt*: opt to take on responsibility;  
embrace a chance to do something new;  
accept the fact, it might be hard;  
support the children in your care;  
affirm the love you have for them.

*Adapt*: three girls—  
a pre-teen and two babies.  
Bad situations;  
broken homes;  
taken from family;  
given to someone new.

*Adopt*: my sister—  
married and divorced;  
accepted children in foster care,  
fell in love with all three;  
two official in 2018;  
one official in 2019.

*Adapted*: to issues;  
to complications;  
to disfunction;

to brokenness.

*Adopted:* into love;  
into comfort;  
into family;  
into wholeness.

*Adapt* and *adopt*  
though one letter apart  
can build a family  
of love, care, and warmth.

“Family Tree”—Matthew West

'Cause you're my child  
You're my chosen  
You are loved  
You are loved

And I will restore  
All that was broken  
You are loved  
You are loved

The lyrics of this song tell the children of God that He loves them. However, I can also see this as an adoption song. The new parent(s) and family are trying to help the child heal from what has happened. They are ensuring that the child knows that he/she is loved. This song holds so much meaning for the child of God and for children who have been adopted.



## Saving My Superman

Isaiah 53:5: We are healed

“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.”

All my life I have heard this verse. All my life I have believed this verse. In 2008, my family lived this verse. As a collective group, we called on God to heal my dad. We prayed for the blood of Jesus to wash over him and heal his body. Yes, doctors and modern medicine helped, but only God could do the work that had to be done in the healing.

Right now, life may be a little crazy. Things may not be going the way they were planned. After the past two year, beginning in 2020 with the pandemic, who has not had to change plans and paths. Who has not suffered sickness and needed healing? Calling on the name of Jesus and believing in the stripes that were put on His back before He died can and will bring healing to the body. I have learned that healing does not have to be physical. It can mental or spiritual as well. No matter what kind of healing is needed, the stripes on Jesus' back were placed there for it.

## Saving My Superman

“The surgery went well,” the exhausted surgeon sighed as he met our family in the waiting room. “If you had kept him at home last night, he would not still be here.”

At 6 AM, those words are a blessing and a curse.

On October 8, 2008, my father, a tractor-trailer truck driver, had an accident. It was not his first wreck, but it will always be the one that I remember most. That day, Dad completed his normal truck route, and when he returned to the loading dock, the dispatcher told him that a small load needed to go to a local construction site. The load was so small, in fact, that it would fit in the back of a pick-up truck. The loaders got the truck ready, and Dad headed off. The job site was not more than five miles from the truck yard.

A few minutes later, Dad rear-ended another truck; it was one of those with the utility bed on it. It was bigger than the truck Dad was driving. The airbags in Dad’s truck deployed and the windows broke. Witnesses called 9-1-1, and Dad was taken to a local hospital. I can never remember if the hospital called my mom or if Dad did, but either way, someone called Mom. She called the pastor and his wife, and the three of them headed to Charlotte. On the way, Mom called me. My husband had just walked in the door from work and answered the phone.

“We will head that way.” Those were his only words to my mom.

“Les, your dad has been in an accident. Your mom has Ms. Betty on stand-by to watch Chasity. He is at CMC-Main.”

“Ok, let’s go.” I yelled at him as I grabbed my bag, our daughter, her stuff, and our jackets. I am a daddy’s girl, and I needed to get there right away.

We dropped our daughter off at Ms. Betty’s house. She’s a family friend who worked in the same daycare as my mom. Our daughter, Chasity, knew her well, so it was a play date for

her. I have never witnessed time moving so slowly and traffic appearing out of nowhere like I did that day. The twenty-five-minute drive seemed to take hours, and I was on the phone with Mom most of the time. Mom was trying to give me updates, but she did not know anything because no one had been allowed back to see my dad yet. We did not know if the doctors had seen him. We knew nothing; it was terrifying.

When we arrived, the emergency room waiting area was full, and no one had been back to see my dad. Finally, the pastor decided to use his “Power of Clergy” and go check on Dad. He was gone only a few minutes and returned to tell us Dad was in good spirits and on a gurney in the hallway. The emergency room had run out of rooms!

After waiting about an hour, I was tired of waiting and not getting any response to questions. I walked to the desk and informed the nurse that I was going to see my dad.

“Ma’am, we can’t let you do that right now.”

“Is there a reason why other patients can have visitors, but Dad can’t?”

“No ma’am. We just have to keep the hallways clear.”

I was growing more agitated by the word. “From what I hear, there are several patients on gurneys in the hallway. My dad is one of them. He has just been in an accident, and no one knows anything about his condition because we can’t see him. So, the next time those doors open,” I pointed to the double doors leading the hallway of rooms, “I’m going in.”

“Ma’am, you can’t.”

Unfortunately for the nurse, the doors opened, as someone returned to the waiting area. I walked in, looked around, and located my dad. I made a beeline for his side. I knew, considering the part of town we were in, there was a chance security would be coming soon.

When I got to Dad, he smiled. I told him what I had just done; he laughed but only until he winced from the broken ribs. He told me that he had glass in his hand from the window, and they were going to get all of it out that they could. He said that he was hurting all over, but especially his left wrist. I looked at his hand, and it was purple and swollen. My dad has the natural, red mud-colored skin of someone who is part Cherokee Indian.

“Which doctor has been working on you,” I asked. When he pointed him out, I went over and introduced myself. I explained that Dad’s left hand needed attention. After a few x-rays, Dad was given a plaster cast for his broken wrist.

After I was satisfied that Dad was going to be discharged that night, I left. Mom, the pastor, his wife, and my brother, Donnie, were there to make sure Dad got home. Tony and I scooped Chasity up from Ms. Betty’s house and scooted home to get her ready for bed; it was a school night after all.

Over the next week, Dad was feeling better, getting stronger, and learning to use his elbows for things. With his left wrist broken and his right one bandaged and sore from the glass pieces, he looked funny trying to get out of his big recliner leaning on his elbows instead of his hands.

On Wednesday, October 15, 2008, Dad was feeling well enough to attend Bible study at church. The men of the church moved a recliner into the sanctuary so Dad could sit there. After church, he and Mom went home, ate supper, and watched *Georgia Rule* on television. Dad called me to tell me that it was on, and I was already watching it. As the movie credits rolled and Channel 9 did a split screen to start the news, our phone rang. I had watched the end of the movie in the bed because earlier that day I had dental work done and was still feeling the effects of the anesthesia.

“Wait! What? Leslie is in the bed.” My husband’s words jarred me from drowsing.

I jumped out of the bed. “What’s wrong!?”

“Your mom is on her house phone with 9-1-1. Your dad is unresponsive.”

“Keep her on the phone. I’m on the way.”

We lived within walking distance of my parents. I jumped back into my clothes. Kissed Chasity, who was already asleep, and ran out to our Monte Carlo. I did not grab a jacket, just my bag and keys.

The driveway to our townhouse complex had a hill, and I made it to the top but had to stop so the fire truck could fly by. I pulled out behind it and flew down the road towards my parents’ house. After the fire truck turned onto their street, I had to wait for the ambulance coming from the opposite direction to turn onto their street behind it. The fire truck parked in front of the neighbor’s house. The ambulance pulled into the driveway. I parked at the bottom of the front yard hill.

I vaulted out of the car and tore through the front yard toward the door.

“Ma’am, stop! Where are you going? Ma’am?!” The EMTs were trying to get my attention.

“My parents live here.”

“You can’t go in. We have to evaluate him first.”

“I can guarantee you that if he’s conscious, I’m going to be the only person who can deal with him. I’m going in.” I waited for the EMTs to enter and ran in the door behind them.

“Mom, what’s going on?”

“His breathing was shallow, and he wasn’t responding to me. I was beating on his chest. I know it had to hurt him,” her breathless reply frightened me.

“Is he awake?” I was terrified of the answer.

“I’m NOT going to the hospital.” Dad was yelling at the EMTs. “I’m fine. I don’t need to go to the hospital.”

After a few minutes of talking to Dad and taking his vitals, the EMTs left the living room where Dad was and came to my mom. “Ma’am, he’s in no condition to sign this himself. Can you sign that he is refusing treatment?”

Mom’s eyes pleaded with me as he handed her the paper.

“Wait. He’s going to the hospital.” I left Mom in the dining room and pushed past the EMTs standing in the doorway. “Give me the room.”

“You want us to leave?” The fireman was more than a little confused.

“The room yes. Give me just a minute with him.” When everyone left the room, I stood in front of Dad in his oversized recliner.

“I’m not going to the hospital. I’m fine.” He was trying to reassure himself more than me.

I straddled his knees; I put one hand on each side of the head of the chair. “Rick Parker, if I was in this chair, what would you make me do?”

He avoided eye contact.

“Look at me. What would you make me do?”

“I’d make you go the hospital.” He gave me his stern dad look that would normally strike fear in my heart.

“Well, guess where you’re going.”

“I am not.”

I inched my face closer to his. “You can do this the hard way or the easy way, but you *are* going to the hospital tonight.” I had never used that tone with my dad.

“Fine,” he conceded.

“You can either stand up and get on the gurney yourself, or they can help you. Which will it be?” I could finally see his defenses falling.

“I’ll stand up.”

“Hey guys, a couple of you need to come in here and help him up. He’s going to the hospital,” I called to the EMTs in the other room.

In amazement, they came back into the room. A couple of them worked to help Dad from the chair. However, I had not told them yet that his ribs and wrist were broken. They also did not realize Dad’s size. By looking at him sitting in the chair, he did not appear his true size, more than 300 pounds and six-foot-three. He is a big man, and they had a struggle to get him out of the recliner, since he could not help them.

Mom handed the refusal of treatment papers back to the fireman, unsigned. As they loaded Dad onto the gurney and worked to get him out the front door, Mom and I grabbed some things for an overnight at the hospital. Once they had him in the ambulance, we got in my car and followed behind them.

When we arrived at the hospital, the staff at the check-in desk took us straight to the ambulance unloading area, and we were allowed to walk directly to the room with Dad. He was talking and laughing with us. You would have thought that nothing had happened to him and that we were being overly dramatic by forcing this emergency room visit.

It was not long until he was not feeling well again. His blood pressure dropped to thirty-five over something. The doctors were doing everything they could to find the reason. They did blood work, MRIs, CT scans, and everything else in the hospital alphabet to solve the mystery.

Finally, around 2 AM, after completing another round of tests and scans, the doctors discovered internal bleeding. Dad's spleen had ruptured.

When he had the accident a week prior, there was a lot of internal swelling. His spleen had been injured, possibly torn at that time. As the swelling lessened, the pressure holding the tear in the spleen together loosened. His spleen ruptured, causing massive internal bleeding. It all happened in that split second when he was standing up to go to bed after watching *Georgia Rule*.

During all the testing and working to figure everything out, my sister, the pastor, his wife, and my brother had all made their ways to the hospital. The doctor came into the room, where we were all waiting with Dad to get answers and told us Dad was going to have to have emergency surgery; his spleen had to be removed.

As they prepped Dad for surgery, we were taken to a family waiting room with couches and televisions, books, and magazines, but nothing of real comfort. When the surgeon came in to introduce himself and tell us they were ready to take him to surgery, we gathered around the doctor and prayed over him. Then, we all returned to Dad's room and prayed over him. We walked down the hall to the entry of the surgical ward, and we were directed to the waiting room.

As I leaned over to kiss Dad on the forehead before they rolled him over the "Do Not Enter" line, he whispered our family motto to me, "God's got a plan."

That early in the morning, no one else was in the surgery center waiting room, so the staff brought us pillows and blankets. I wrapped myself in my dad's black, Dale Earnhardt coat as I laid on the floor trying to rest and ignore the pain in my mouth and stomach. I had not eaten anything in over twenty-four hours because of my dental work the previous day, and I was starving.



Throughout the surgery, the staff at the surgery center gave us updates. All during the night and early morning, I had been calling Tony to give him updates. He was at home with Chasity, while she slept.

When it was over, the surgeon came to talk to the family. He smiled and sighed. “The surgery went well.” We could see the exhaustion covering his entire body. “If you had kept him at home last night, he would not still be here.”

Those words were a blessing. They meant Dad was going to recover and be alright. We all celebrated in our own ways at the news. I cried. There was nothing else I could do. After the surgeon answered all our questions about the procedure and recovery, I left the hospital. I returned home in time to shower and change clothes. Tony and I took Chasity to school, but we did not tell her anything about the events of the night until we picked her up that afternoon. Once she was at school, Tony and I went back to the hospital to sit with Dad for a while so Mom could go home. Dad was in the hospital for a few days, and when he returned home, he was back to his old self again.

As a Daddy’s girl, I have always thought my father was invincible. That night in the hospital, he met his Kryptonite. I am so blessed to be able to say I played a little part in being able to save my Superman.

## Super Dad

With his super hearing,  
my whispers on the back pew  
carried to the piano bench  
where he sat playing and singing in service.

His dad stare and ultrasonic finger snap  
stopped me in my tracks  
in church, crowded malls,  
or anywhere else I wasn't following directions.

The untiring ability to leave his day job  
to go to something or be somewhere for his kids  
gave us a work ethic, sense of responsibility,  
and knowledge of what a father is.

No matter what crazy thing  
one of us wanted to try  
he always supported us (and still does)  
and caused us to be our best at it.

Even now, as age has slowed his steps,  
he makes an effort to be  
anywhere and everywhere, that is important  
for his family and those he loves.

He doesn't have super powers,  
but he shows amazing strength  
in the way he follows  
God's plan for our family.

“God’s Got a Plan”—The Crabb Family

“Oh we may not always know the plan  
But we know for sure  
That the steps of a righteous man  
Are ordered by the Lord  
He doesn't always tell us what he's thinking  
He just wants us to trust and hold his hand  
He knows the end from the beginning  
In this crazy mixed up world we're living in  
Ain't you glad, God has a plan”

My dad has always told me that God does not tell me His plans because I would try to change them or mess them up. He is probably right about that. The lyrics of “God’s Got a Plan” by The Crabb Family share that God has a purpose, plan, and path for our lives. However, He does not tell us what the plans are before we need to know. God wants us to trust that He has the best plan in place. No matter if it is a job, healing, a family matter, or anything else. God knows what is going on and has put something in the works before we ever get to it.

## Call the Ball

Joshua 6: Joshua and Israel defeat Jericho

20 So the people shouted when the priests blew with the trumpets: and it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city.

In this story, God has promised Israel the city of Jericho as their own. God instructs Joshua to take the people and walk around the wall of Jericho for six days. On the seventh day, the priests would blow seven horns and the people would sing and shout. When they did this, God would make the walls of Jericho fall flat. Israel was obedient and followed what God instructed them to do. On the seventh day, the seven horns blew, and the walls fell. Only Rahab and her family were saved because she had saved the Israelite spies when they came into Jericho.

Still today, if we walk around the walls of our problems and pray or rejoice, God will make them crumble. He still has the power to cause miracles to happen for His children. He still takes care of His people. Pray, rejoice, and call on God. Watch the walls of the things in life fall to the ground as God handles them.

### Call the Ball: The Diamond Miracle

From the first day of little league practice, what is the one rule you are supposed to remember for the rest of your life? Call the ball! Let me repeat that a little louder for the folks in the back: Call. The. Ball.

In March of 1988, my brother, Donnie, was a high school freshman and had just completed tryouts; he was named as a starter on the junior varsity baseball team. Spring break started in Cabarrus County the week after tryouts, and my brother was not going to use this time as a week-long hiatus from practice. Donnie, Dad, and our friend Lee went to the local park, which had a baseball field. My dad had coached Donnie in sports—soccer, baseball, and basketball—for all of Donnie’s life, so a day on the field with a friend was nothing new. This day would prove to be different.

The church I grew up in had a daycare center at this time. My mom worked there; on school breaks, I went with her. My options were typically going with Mom or going with Dad. I did *not* want to spend a hot North Carolina spring day at a baseball field with the guys, so I chose Mom and the air conditioning.

After spending the day at the ball field, Donnie and Dad took Lee home. Then, the two of them came to pick Mom and me up from the daycare. When we went out to get into the car, Donnie was doubled over in the backseat. At first glance, Mom and I thought he was tired and trying to relax, but on second look, we saw the pain in his face. Donnie, fourteen years old and a lifetime athlete, had a high pain tolerance. Seeing him like this was shocking for me.

Mom asked what happened, and Dad explained. “I was hitting high fly balls into the outfield. Donnie and Lee were both running for the ball. Donnie called the ball, and Lee fell flat

on the ground so Donnie could jump for it. When Donnie jumped, his foot clipped Lee's side, and he twisted in the air and fell as he caught the ball."

Donnie said, "Yes, I caught the ball." He sounded weak.

Mom asked, "What about Lee?"

Donnie and Dad confirmed that Lee was fine, and we headed home. Donnie was still in a lot of pain, so Mom and Dad took me to my grandparents' house; they lived within walking distance, so I visited all the time. My parents took Donnie to the emergency room. At the hospital, Donnie was scanned, x-rayed, poked, and prodded, and the emergency room doctor came back with a diagnosis of bruised ribs. They mummy-wrapped Donnie's midsection and began the discharge process.

As they were waiting for the discharge papers, Dr. Henry, a family friend and the doctor for all the athletic events at Donnie's school, walked by. He spotted Donnie and stopped in his tracks. He got the story from Mom and Dad because Donnie was hurting too much to talk. He told them he wanted to run a couple more tests, and he stopped the discharge process.

But God!

After completing the tests, Dr. Henry returned to the exam room and informed my parents that Donnie's kidney was injured. "Mr. and Mrs. Parker, your son's kidney is in seven pieces. When he twisted in the air to catch the ball, his ribs lacerated his kidney. If you take him home right now, he will drown from his bodily fluids."

Dad called Grandmother and Papaw, and the three of us headed to the hospital. My parents called my other grandparents, the pastor, and several other people from church as well, all of whom made a beeline for the hospital. Before Donnie went in for surgery, we prayed over him.

As Donnie was in surgery, the women gathered to pray and wait in the closest waiting room, with all the children that had to come, like me. The men were pacing in a circle, like marching at the walls of Jericho, just outside the doors of the operating room. Several times, the door to the operating room opened and a nurse tried to speak to my dad, but she could not. God would not allow it. The men were creating a wall of prayer for my brother.

A few hours into the surgery, Dr. Henry came out of the operating room.

“Mr. Parker, when we got in for the surgery, there were only three pieces of kidney. One was a complete half. The other was almost a half, but it is missing a silver dollar-sized piece. We may have to close him up without that small piece; we can’t locate it.”

Dad looked at the doctor and with the knowledge given to him by God said, “Go lift the healthy kidney. It’s under there.”

Dr. Henry tried to disagree but could not. He returned to the operating room.

After another hour or so, Dr. Henry and Dr. Norton, another family friend, came out of the operating room. The men were still circling in the hallway, like walking around Jericho, but they stopped when the door opened.

“Mr. Parker,” Dr. Henry started, “Donnie is headed to recovery. We found the small piece, under the healthy kidney, like you said. We expect a complete recovery.”

Donnie spent several days in the hospital after the surgery. When he came home, he had to stay in the bed most of the time. His teachers sent work for him, and a tutor came to give him tests. Donnie missed the baseball season that year, but he did get return to school for the last couple of weeks just in time for exams before summer break. He never played baseball in high school, but he played in the local, public recreational league.

After the surgery, Donnie had a slew of follow-up appointments. The doctors ran tests every time. Each time the results came back the same; the kidney that God pieced back together from seven pieces to three was stronger than the uninjured kidney. As far as we know, it still is.

We were blessed that God sent Dr. Henry, a family friend and believer, to the emergency room that day. I could have lost my brother, but, instead, I now have two nieces, three nephews, and a great-niece. All five of Donnie's children have played baseball or softball at some point. Donnie has coached many of their teams. Every team, every year is told the same three words: Call. The. Ball!



## Lessons from Baseball

offense and defense  
coaches and players  
Can't win the game  
when the whole team's not there.

infield and outfield  
strikeouts and homeruns  
Everyone's absolute best  
is how baseball is won.

pitching and catching  
run and now slide  
Both teams are amazing;  
the score is now tied.

home and away teams  
friends, family, and fans  
The game's not complete  
without support from the stands.

winning and losing  
try and fail  
Baseball teaches lessons  
we all should know well.

Find a team.  
Do our best.  
Be amazing.  
Put our support system to the test.

“Wall of Prayer”—McKameys

“Sometimes a wall of grace sometimes a wall of faith  
Other times it's sweet mercy that I need.  
But the one for which I long it makes all the others strong.  
I need a wall of prayer surrounding me.”

One of my most favorite people ever used to sing this song at our church. She may still sing it, but we do not attend church together any longer. I fell in love with the lyrics the first time I heard them. As I was writing the story about my brother's miracle, I realized that the men in the hallway were creating a “Wall of Prayer” for my brother.

I know that this lady of God is a prayer warrior. I know that she covers my family (immediate and extended) in prayer on a regular basis. When I feel like I need a little extra help, I still call her up, or have my mom send her a message, and ask her for a “Wall of Prayer.” She always comes through with it, too. Not too long after, maybe a couple of days later, she will call or message to see how the situation is going. I love being able to say that I have people in my life who can create a prayer wall for me when I cannot do it for myself.

## Restoring Vision

Matthew 20: 29-34: Jesus healed the blind

29 And as they departed from Jericho, a great multitude followed him.

30 And, behold, two blind men sitting by the way side, when they heard that Jesus passed by, cried out, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David.

31 And the multitude rebuked them, because they should hold their peace: but they cried the more, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David.

32 And Jesus stood still, and called them, and said, What will ye that I shall do unto you?

33 They say unto him, Lord, that our eyes may be opened.

34 So Jesus had compassion on them, and touched their eyes: and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed him.

In the Bible, Jesus healed many people. In this story, there were two men who wanted Jesus to heal them so badly that they cried out above the noise of the crowd for Jesus. There are times in our lives when we must cry out with a loud voice (physically or spiritually) for God to heal us. The one thing we must be careful to do afterwards is to thank Him. Be thankful for the healing and blessings of God. He will hear our prayers when we call, and He will heal our minds, bodies, and spirits in His time.

## I Can't See

“Tell Mariah, we’re on the way there now,” I said as I picked up my keys from the couch and began walking to the door.

On December 16, 2021, my mom and I had just completed some errands and arrived at her house. It was a few minutes after ten in the morning, and we were sitting on the couch watching whatever Dad had on the television.

Mom’s phone rang, and a couple of seconds later her face dropped.

“Who is it? What’s wrong?” My sister had just told the family that she is having a baby, and, unfortunately, I assumed the worst. In this case, I was not completely wrong.

“Leslie, will you take me to Jada’s school?” Mom’s look scared me.

“Yeah, sure. What’s going on?”

“Mariah just got a call from the school. Jada is crying uncontrollably and saying she can’t see.”

“Tell Mariah, we’re on the way there now.”

Mom slipped her shoes back on and walked to the bathroom. I grabbed my keys, kissed my dad on the forehead, put my shoes on, and picked up my water cup. Since we were at Mom’s house, my purse was in the car already, but I did grab Mom’s bag. “I’m heading to the car!”

As I yelled that down the hallway, Mom opened the bathroom door and walked out. She started toward me, and I told her everything I had picked up already. As we got into the car, we were both worried about how Jada would be when we arrived at the school.

Jada is my six-year-old great-niece. Mariah, my niece, is her mother. Jada is in first grade at a local charter school. She is an only child, but her uncle—her dad’s brother—is less than a year younger than her. They are best friends who get to live together and do almost everything

together. They attend the same school, but he is in kindergarten. On a typical day, Jada is rambunctious. She likes playing with her dogs and all the puppies at her house; sometimes they have as many as ten or twelve puppies at one time. She plays softball, soccer, and basketball, and she never sits still for more than a few minutes. Jada is a ball of energy who is often hard to keep up with.

As with most schools, when you arrive, you must ring the bell, and the office personnel checks the camera before asking what you need. We rang the bell, but before the speaker cracked to life, the door was open and one of the office workers let us in. Mom and I had both known her for a long time, so she knew why we were there. She gave our names to the lady at the desk and pulled us around the counter into the nurse's office.

As we entered, the nurse was talking to Jada who was sitting on the padded table (like in doctor's offices) beside one of the teacher assistants. He had his arm around Jada and was trying to console her as much as he could. The nurse was asking Jada questions about what happened, but she was crying and could not really answer.

I always call Jada "Jada Lou Who." When I entered the room, my mom spoke and Jada moved her head toward us, but her eyes were closed. Tears were running down her cheeks. Mom said, "Jada, do you know who this is?"

"I think it's Mamaw," Jada replied. We smiled, hoping that this was a good thing.

"Jada Lou Who, are you alright?"

"Is that Auntie?" Jada turned her head toward me because I was standing beside her.

"It is Auntie. Can I hold you?" I asked as I held out my hands for her.

She nodded to me, and I sat down on the padded table with her and the teacher. She cuddled into my shoulder and kept crying.

“Jada, Auntie needs to talk to you. Can you talk to Auntie?”

“I don’t know.” She shrugged her entire body as she responded to me.

“First, Auntie needs to get you to calm down a little and stop crying. Can we do that?”

She relaxed against me a little, and I cuddled her and kissed her head.

“Now. I need to know what happened. Can you tell me what happened?”

I could feel her begin to tense up, so I rubbed her back and kissed her head. She took a deep breath and said, “I was sitting in class. I put my head down. I started crying. I couldn’t see.”

“Could you see before you were crying?” my mom asked.

“I cried because I couldn’t see.”

“Can you see now?” the nurse questioned. She held up her fingers. “How many fingers do I have up?”

Jada reached out to feel around the air for the nurse’s hand. She never grabbed it and did not guess any numbers. She stayed on my lap, talked to us, and answered all our questions.

When she opened her eyes, she did not focus on anything. She did not look at anyone or anything specific. I, honestly, believe that Jada could not see anything. I was scared, and I could tell that my mom was too.

We sat in the nurse’s office and waited for Mariah, who works about half an hour from the school, to get there. Jada sat up but did not look at her mom when Mariah came in and spoke to her. I stood Jada on the floor in front of me to see if she could walk to her mom, but she could not. She was very off-balance.

Once Mariah talked to the teacher assistant and the nurse, we started for the car. I asked Jada if she wanted to walk or wanted me to carry her. At first, she said she wanted to walk, but after a few steps, she wanted me to carry her. I did. I pushed my hair away from my shoulders. I

picked her up and put her head on my right shoulder. I laid her legs over my left arm and supported her back with my right arm. My mom had the key to the car we were driving, so we walked there first and stopped for a minute to talk. Mariah said she did not know what to do. She did not know if she needed to go to the doctor or the hospital or call an ambulance. She was terrified and rightfully so.

As my mom got into the car, I carried Jada to Mariah's car. I sat her down in the front seat so Mariah could talk to her and check on her while she decided what to do next. Then I headed back to get in the car to leave. When we drove toward the exit, Mariah was standing outside of her car trying to get Jada into the car seat. We stopped, and I tried to help.

Jada was fine sitting in the car seat. However, when we tried to put the harness on her, she freaked out. She started kicking and crying. She wanted her mommy but did not want to be held. Mariah was trying to talk to Jaydin, Jada's dad, on the phone. I picked Jada up and put her back in the front seat. Mariah called the doctor, but, as always, she had to hold. Mom called my brother, Donnie. Jada is his granddaughter.

Mom and I tried to keep Mariah as calm as possible because we knew that Jada could tell if her mommy was tense, and it would make things worse. While Mom talked on the phone to Donnie, and Mariah talked to Jaydin and the doctors, I sat on the ground in the parking lot by the open door to Mariah's car.

Jada was relaxing in the passenger seat that we had laid back so she could lie down. She curled up in a ball and rested. I rubbed her back and sang "Jesus Loves Me" as she slept. Then, without any notice, she sat up and started crying, "I want my mommy. Where is my mommy?"

“Jada, it’s Auntie. Mommy’s on the phone talking to Daddy. She’s right here beside Auntie. Listen. Shhhh. You can hear her. Do you hear her?” I spoke as quickly, quietly, and soothingly as I could.

In a much calmer tone, “I want my mommy.”

“Mommy is right here beside Auntie. Now, she’s on the phone talking to the doctor to see what the doctor says to do. Is that ok?”

“Yes. I want my mommy.”

“She can see you and hear you. She’s just trying to talk to people to see how we can get you to feeling better.”

“Ok. I want to lay down.”

“That’s fine baby girl. You lay right there. Auntie isn’t going anywhere. Can I rub your back like this?” I put my hand on her back, and she pushed it away. “I won’t do that. I’ll just sit right here with you.” I sat there whisper-singing “Jesus Loves Me” for a minute or two.

Then we repeated this scenario. Four or five times. Every minute or two, she would wake up, and we replayed the scene.

Finally, Mariah had an answer. The doctor called back to say that Jada needed to go to the emergency room. She explained the situation of not being able to get her into the car seat. Mariah decided to put the passenger seatbelt on Jada and drive the short distance to the hospital. We followed her, and I carried Jada in. Before leaving, I hugged Jada tightly, told her that Auntie loved her very much, and placed her on Mariah’s lap. Just a few minutes later, Mary, my sister-in-law was at the hospital to be with them.



All of this happened in the span of two hours. By noon, Mariah was in the waiting room at the emergency room with Jada, and she had originally gotten the phone call at ten that morning.

I took Mom to her house and told her to let me know any updates from Mariah. A little later Mom sent me a message that Jada was admitted to the hospital. My first thought was *Oh no! It's so close to Christmas*. Apparently, I was not prepared for the Christmas miracle we were about to receive.

At the hospital, the doctors examined Jada and checked for a possible seizure. They ran and EKG and EEG. All the tests results were normal. No fever. No high blood pressure. No infection. According to the test, nothing was wrong. The problem: Jada could not see.

During the night, the staff continued to monitor Jada. On the morning of December 17, 2021, when Jada woke up, and the doctor examined her, she could see. Jada was able to identify colors and have a conversation with the doctor. She was complaining that she was tired and was still a little unsteady when she tried to walk, but she could see.

That day and during the night, they continued to watch Jada. They looked for signs that something was wrong. The doctors could not believe that none of the tests showed anything. Once all the evaluations were completed and nothing showed up on the results, Jada was released to go home. She left the hospital on December 19, 2021.

A few days later, we had the family Christmas dinner. I knew that Jada was home and doing well. I had heard all the results from the tests and doctors. Nothing was wrong with her. When Mariah, Jaydin, and Jada came in the door at Mom and Dad's house on Christmas, I was sitting at the dining room table talking to people. I pushed my chair back and motioned for Jada to come to me.

“Hey Auntie.”

“Hey Jada Lou Who. You know that Auntie loves you and I’m so glad you’re all better?”

She hugged me tightly and smiled at me. “I love you lots and lots kiddo.”

“I love you Auntie.” Those were the best words I could have heard.

Jada was back to normal. There were no signs that anything had ever been wrong. Now, Mariah must monitor Jada for headaches, but she has not had any. The doctors gave her a preventative medicine for seizures. Still, when she goes in for follow-up appointments, the doctors are amazed at the Christmas miracle we received.

Open My Eyes

Open my eyes...

I want to see...

the glory of God.  
the dead living again.  
families coming together.  
people being healed.  
the deaf able to hear.  
the cripple able to walk.  
the sun rising and setting.  
the trees moving in the wind.  
blind eyes being opened.  
churches being filled.  
miracles happening all around.

Open my eyes...

I want to see...no! I need to see...

Jesus!

“Open the Eyes of My Heart Lord”—Michael W. Smith

“Open the eyes of my heart, Lord  
Open the eyes of my heart  
I want to see You  
I want to see You”

Sometimes our literal eyes need to be opened so we can see what God is doing. Other times, God needs to touch our hearts so we can see what He miracles He is performing around us. As I held my great-niece in the nurse’s office of her school that day, I sang in her ear, “Jesus Loves Me” because I have never held a crying child that song could not calm.

However, after I carried her into the emergency room and handed her to my niece, this song hit my heart. I knew that God was working on Jada’s physical eyes, but He was showing me that I needed to open my heart’s eyes to catch the work He was about to do. I am so glad I got to witness it.

This song is a prayer to be sung to God so He will open our eyes to see what He has in store for His people. We need to ask Him to show us His glory and His plan for our lives.

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