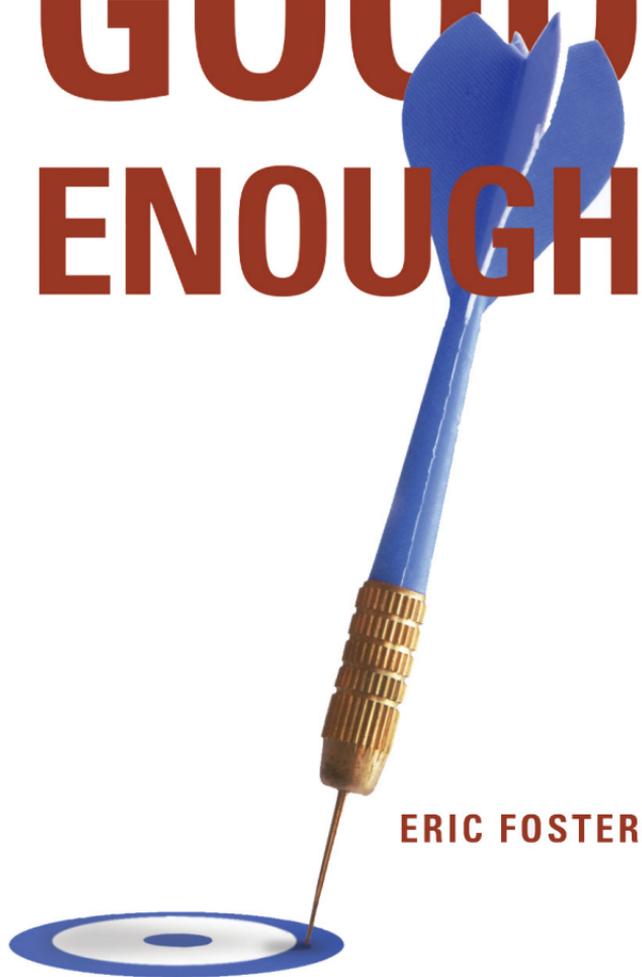


# GOOD ENOUGH



ERIC FOSTER



# Dedication

To my son, Joshua.

I am reminded of the Lord's love and  
faithfulness every time I look at you.  
May you grow into a strong man of God,  
serving and loving Him with all  
your heart, all your soul, all your strength  
and all your mind, knowing  
that He will be with you always.

*“No one will be able to stand up against you  
all the days of your life. As I was with Moses,  
so I will be with you; I will never leave you  
nor forsake you.”*

*Joshua 1:5*



# Good Enough

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## Chapter 1

### The Unseen

“Can I put the worm on the hook again, Dad?” asked Frank’s nine-year-old son Josh from the back seat. “I’ll try not to drop any of them,” he continued.

“Sure,” replied Frank as he glanced into the rearview mirror and smiled. “I’m sure you’ll do great.”

The morning sun began to shine through the white, fluffy clouds and rainbow-colored leaves as Frank drove down the familiar country road, headed toward his favorite fishing spot.

“He’s a great kid,” added Jason, Frank’s longtime friend and fishing buddy. They had been friends since grade school. They grew up three houses away from each other. Their birthdays were two days apart and as long as they could remember, would go fishing together to celebrate.

Over the last ten years, they tried to stay in touch as their lives started to drift apart. It was a hard task since Frank had moved to Fairfield to start his job. But they kept their annual fishing ritual intact, despite the physical distance that separated them.

“Thanks. I guess I’ll keep him,” he smiled as he winked at Josh in the mirror. “I’m glad that you were able to get the time off work.”

Frank enjoyed the trips and now that his son was old enough to go with them, he enjoyed them even more. He loved spending time with his son, but was often too busy with his work schedule. He had made it a point to keep this weekend open for the fishing trip and Josh was excited to finally be “one of the guys”.

Three weeks ago they had celebrated Josh’s ninth birthday. He gave Josh a new fishing pole and tackle box with what seemed like a thousand hooks and lures in it. As they drove along Josh held tightly to his prized possession in the back seat. He couldn’t wait to finally be able to go fishing with his dad and “Uncle Jason”.

“I wouldn’t miss it. Where do you want to park this time?” Jason asked as he gazed off into the morning sky. “Last time we were over on the east side and didn’t catch anything. I’d like to find a spot where we can actually catch something!”

“Well, if you remember, we parked there for the shade. And I think you suggested it,” smiled Frank.

Frank’s cell phone rang and interrupted their discussion. Frank reached for the phone and saw the phone

number. "It's Mommy!" he exclaimed, looking in the rearview mirror at Josh. "Hi, honey. Is everything okay?"

Josh smiled and began to wave to the phone. "Hi, Mommy!" he called as if she could see him waving.

"Yeah, everything is fine," replied Jodi, his wife of ten years. "I just wanted to see if you would be able to stop by the store on the way home from the lake and pick up a few things."

"Sure," replied Frank. "What do you need?" as he reached for his pen. It slipped through his fingers and fell to the floor by his foot. He reached for the pen and took his eyes off the road for a split second.

"I need you to get something to bring for dessert tonight to Jon and Sara's hou..." Her request was cut short by a loud screech as Frank slammed on his brakes and turned his wheel, trying to avoid hitting the oncoming car that swerved into his lane.

"Frank? Frank! Are you there?" she yelled frantically into the phone.

The screech of the tires was quickly followed by a thud, as Frank's cell phone hit the floor. He frantically gripped the steering wheel and tried to regain control as his SUV slipped across the pavement.

"Frank!" she cried again as she heard the two most important voices in her world scream, quickly followed by the sound of crashing metal and breaking glass.

“Frank? Josh? Are you there?” she yelled as tears burst from her eyes, desperately hoping for the best while fearing the worst. She ran to the door, grabbed her keys off the small wooden table, and ran barefoot to the driveway, getting into the car.

The dog that had run in front of the on-coming car sprinted off the road into a nearby yard. When George, the driver of the oncoming car, saw the dog leap in front of his path, he quickly jerked the wheel to the left to avoid hitting him. As he did, the morning sun’s rays shone through the colored leaves, making it impossible for him to see Frank’s SUV rapidly approaching.

Before either driver could realize what was happening, the two vehicles had become a twisted mess of metal, pushing Frank’s off the road and onto the shoulder. As his tires hit the loose gravel, Frank lost control. His vehicle swerved into the ditch and rolled down the steep embankment.

They were jolted to a stop as they collided with a massive pine tree, throwing Jason through the windshield. He landed twenty feet from the vehicle and was covered with glass. The SUV rolled completely upside down, crushing the driver’s side and trapping Frank and Josh inside.

Josh watched in terror as Jason was propelled through the glass, covered in blood and bits of the windshield. He saw that his father was pinned between his seat and steering wheel and wrestled with the seat belt, trying to free himself.

He finally was able to get free, falling to the roof

below him and fumbled to open the door. His left arm was broken and he crawled from the SUV, leaving his precious tackle box behind.

George unhooked his seat belt and ran to where Jason had landed and saw his bloody, broken body. He frantically called 911 and told the operator of the accident. As he gave the details and location of the crash and Jason's condition, he saw Josh crawling out of the rear window, yelling, "Dad, Dad! Wake up!"

George ran to the boy's side, scooping him into his arms as the boy cried. "You need to send 3 ambulances!" yelled George in a panic. "Hurry!"

It was only four minutes later and George could hear the sound of the ambulances drawing near, but it seemed like an eternity. The screaming sirens of the responding paramedics were a relief to George as he held the little boy, trying to comfort him. George looked at one stranger on the ground, and one still in the truck, hoping that they would both survive.

By the time the ambulances and police arrived, four other drivers had stopped and were directing traffic around the scattered glass and twisted bumper of George's car, now lying in the middle of the road. One woman had taken Josh away from the scene, trying to comfort the scared boy.

As the rescue teams worked, George stood in shock, watching the two strangers with whom he would now have an eternal bond. Jason struggled to take each breath; and Frank was being pulled from his truck, unconscious.

“Sir,” the technician declared, “You have to move back. We need room to work here!” In a daze, George took a step back, feeling the heaviness of guilt weighing on his heart.

“I didn’t see him. I didn’t even see him,” George repeated to the questioning officer as tears welled up in his eyes.

He turned to see the crying boy in the arms of a stranger and thought about his own children. “We’re losing him!” yelled one of the technicians working on Jason.

George’s eyes flew from Josh to the bloody stranger as he was sharply brought back from his thoughts. As they worked on Frank, George quietly wept, seeing both men slip farther from this world.

Frank slipped in and out of consciousness several times, each time opening his eyes to see a different face above him, hooking him up to equipment, getting ready to transfer him to the ambulance.

“Hold on, buddy,” consoled Jim, a red-haired paramedic in his thirties. “You’re not going anywhere yet!”

“Ready, one, two, lift,” yelled Jim as they hoisted him onto the stretcher and rushed to the ambulance.

“I found a cell phone!” Frank faintly heard from one of the officers searching through the crumpled SUV.

“Jodi!” Frank said in desperation, in a whisper-soft voice. “Tell Jodi.” He once again slipped into unconsciousness.

“Call someone named Jodi, probably his wife,” the paramedic yelled to the officer as they closed the door to the ambulance. The loud roar of the ambulance and flashing lights didn’t wake him this time.

The second ambulance sped away and a white Toyota Camry screeched to a halt. Jodi jumped out, crying and yelling, “What’s going on? Where’s Frank? Where’s Josh?” she sobbed.

“Mommy! Mommy!” yelled Josh as he saw his mother get out of her car. He tried to push his way from the paramedic who was wrapping his arm. Jodi ran to her son and scooped him into her arms.

“Is he okay?” she demanded from the paramedic as she hugged her bruised, broken son.

“Your son is going to be fine. He is banged up and his arm looks broken, but he looks okay,” replied the paramedic who had checked him over.

“We need to take him to the hospital to get checked out. You can ride with us in the ambulance.”

He gently put his arm around Jodi, leading her and Josh to the ambulance. She was dazed by all that was going on in front of her.

Her eyes suddenly caught the crumpled, overturned SUV. “Oh my God!” gasped Jodi as she burst into tears. “Oh my God!”

She couldn’t help but stare at the crumpled truck still wrapped around the tree, wondering if she would ever see her husband alive again.

“Where’s Frank?” she demanded. “Where’s my husband? Is he okay?”

“He is on his way to the hospital. They will take good care of him,” insisted the paramedic. “We need to go now, Ma’am.” He led her and Josh toward the ambulance.

Jason remained unconscious in the back of his ambulance as it rushed to the hospital. The paramedics worked on him, but he continued to lose more blood and slip further from this world. One paramedic was keeping him alive while the other two tried to stop him from bleeding to death.

Twenty minutes after the SUV rolled down the hill, their valiant attempts failed. He simply lost too much blood from the massive gashes in his neck and head – results of his encounter with the windshield.

The ambulance pulled into the emergency entrance and the paramedics slowly opened the back door to the ambulance in defeat. They lowered Jason’s lifeless body onto the dolly and wheeled him inside.

Three miles behind them, Frank’s ambulance sped along the streets, racing against time.

Frank lay in the back of his ambulance, limp and attached to multiple tubes and monitors. Many of his bones had been broken when his vehicle bent around him.

“We’re losing him!” yelled Jim in the back of the speeding ambulance, seeing the heart monitor move from a faint beat to a solid, flat line.

“Get the paddles!” he continued, as he prepared to bring him back to life.

“Ready...Clear!”





## Chapter 2

### Reunited

“He’s back,” Frank faintly heard as he regained consciousness. He slowly opened his eyes, but could only make out faint images of the paramedics and the back of the ambulance.

*What’s going on?* he thought as he tried to wrap his mind around the events of the morning. He suddenly remembered his son. *Is Joshua okay? he thought. What have I done? Will I ever see Jodi again?*

His thoughts drifted back to the day when he and Jodi were reunited. Their separate lives once again headed toward each other until they permanently collided on that special day. It was fate, they both were convinced of that.

It was 9:20 on a cloudy Tuesday morning as he pulled into the parking lot of Baker and Dunn. Frank was one of the newest executives with the small but growing marketing firm situated on the outskirts of Fairfield.

He was a talented finance manager who began working there three years ago. He quickly worked his way into his current position and was well respected by the rest of the leadership team. The firm had a great reputation and was growing fast. Two months ago, it acquired a smaller firm and was in the process of integrating the two staffs into one team.

“There’s heavy congestion on the interstate. I’d try an alternate route as you make your way into work today,” announced the morning DJ, as he once again read the traffic report while Frank searched for a parking spot in the overcrowded lot.

“Thanks a lot for telling me now! It’s a little late, don’t you think?” he barked, a bit frustrated that he didn’t take an alternate route.

Finding a spot in the seventh row of the lot, he got out, slammed the door and marched into the building. As he walked toward the tall glass building he looked at his watch, hoping that somehow the time had changed. He growled to himself, knowing that he would be late for the weekly staff meeting.

After the meeting, he walked to his office and checked his e-mail, hoping to find good news about at least one of the proposals he had sent out. All he found was an inbox full of ads and junk mail. He hoped that his day would turn around soon. Nothing seemed to go his way.

He worked quietly at his desk until 11:30, then walked to the break room to meet his friend Tim. As was their tradition, the two men were having their Tuesday sports lunch, discussing the results of last night’s football game. They were diehard fans and last night’s game was a disappointment.

Frank and Tim had met in college, joined the same fraternity and became great friends. After college, they both applied to Baker and Dunn. Frank began working there right after graduation and Tim took a job with a competitor. After a year of disappointing work and Frank's encouragement, Tim joined their staff and they began to work together.

"Hey, it's great to have you back. How was your trip?" Frank asked as he filled his mug.

"It was great. I wish I could have stayed longer. I'll have to show you pictures sometime," offered Tim.

"That would be great. Where exactly in India did you visit?" asked Frank as he sipped his coffee. "I've got to tell you, I don't think I would have picked India for a vacation."

"Well, it wasn't really just a vacation. I went with a group of people from a church to help people out. It was more of a..."

Tim lost his train of thought as he noticed an attractive woman walk past the door, carrying a stack of paperwork. "Wow! Who was that?" asked Tim.

"Her name is Jodi," replied Frank, as he waved to the woman walking by the doorway. "She was here for a few months when I first started, then got an offer to work in Europe with another company. We really hit it off, though. She was great to work with."

The smile on his face as he remembered working with Jodi told Tim that there was a lot more to the story.

"I don't remember you talking about her. What is she going to do here?" Tim asked, looking out the door to the break room.

“I’m not exactly sure. I think she is going to work in our international ad department. Do you want me to introduce you? Maybe she has a friend for you,” asked Frank and snickered, as he got up and walked toward the coffeepot. “Hey, do you want a refill on your coffee?”

“No, thanks,” Tim replied, as he took another sip, “I’ve already had about four cups. And Pam and I,” he continued, “are doing just fine.”

Tim was curious about the look in Frank’s eye when he saw Jodi and wanted more information. “So, how well do you know her?”

“Not that well. We worked together a bit on a few projects and had a few drinks together. That’s about it. She just moved back to the States and sent in her resume. I recommended her to Gabe and he took her back.”

He stared into his coffee as his thoughts drifted back to working with her. “She is brilliant. And she is a great person. Really nice, you know? Not fake. It was great to work with her.”

“It’s nice to hear that I made such a good impression on you,” responded Jodi with a smile, who had walked into the break room while Frank was talking.

“Jodi!” He put down his coffee mug and quickly walked over to meet her. “I was just telling Tim about you,” he continued as they gave each other a hug. She was anything but slow-paced. She walked across the room with speed and purpose, speaking as if she had just washed down an energy bar with a pot of coffee.

“I heard,” she replied with a smile. “I’m glad that we are working together again.” Feeling the awkward

tension as their eyes locked for what seemed an eternity, Tim stood up and walked over to greet her.

“Jodi,” Frank stepped back and smiled, “this is Tim Riley.”

“Nice to meet you, Tim,” as she shook his hand.

“Nice to meet you, too. Welcome back to the team.”

“Thank you,” she replied with a smile. “I look forward to getting to know you. Any friend of Frank’s must be a nice guy.” She had a southern accent that Frank adored. Realizing as she was speaking that she had derailed their conversation, she continued, “Was I interrupting a meeting, or were you two just taking a break?”

“You weren’t interrupting anything.” Tim replied, glancing from Jodi to Frank and back to Jodi, realizing that Frank’s eyes never left her face. “From what Frank is telling me, you are going to be a huge asset to the company.”

“I hope so. I am excited about where we’re going. I was just happy that there was a position open when I got back here.” Jodi glanced back at Frank and noticed the clock hanging on the wall behind him.

“Oh! Hey, I hate to run, but I need to meet with Gabe. I just wanted to stop in and say hello.” She walked toward the door and turned again, pausing to glance toward Frank, softly smiling. “It’s really good to see you again, Frank. We really need to catch up soon. What are you doing Friday night?”

“Nothing,” Frank answered. “Let’s have dinner and catch up.”

“Great. We can leave right after work if you’d like,” Jodi replied. “I’ll stop by your office tomorrow and say hi and make sure that you’re still free.”

Turning and again walking toward the door, she added, “And it was really nice to meet you, Tim.”

She was gone.



## Chapter 3

### Good Enough

The memory of meeting Jodi slowly faded from Frank's mind as he faintly felt the poking and prodding of the paramedics. He saw them bandaging his leg and arm, but then felt nothing. He began to wonder if he was paralyzed or if they had given him enough drugs to dull the pain that much.

He listened to the paramedics talk as they tried desperately to save him. He slowly glanced around the ambulance, watching the monitors and listening to the beeps of the equipment keeping him alive.

The images he saw gradually faded to a blurry haze. The conversation of the paramedics became a distant echo as he slipped into unconsciousness and the heart monitor's steady beep slowed.

"He's leaving us again!" yelled Jim as he grabbed the

paddles. "Clear!"

"Frank," he heard a soothing voice calling to him from a distance. "Frank, come with me."

He felt himself approaching the deep voice but couldn't explain how he was moving. He had forgotten about his bloody body, his pain and his fears. He began to sense someone approaching from his left. He turned to see who or what was there.

As he turned, he saw a figure like a man, but he was unable to see his face. He desperately wanted to ask, "Who are you?" but didn't ask. Frank watched the man as he followed him, looking to his left and right, taking in the scenery as they walked along. The sounds, scents and views were like nothing he had ever seen before. The peace and joy that filled him was indescribable.

Frank was led into a large room, decorated with bright, colorful cut stones. The stones were brilliant, with colors that he had never known before. In the center of the room was a pool of what looked like liquid silver.

The room was surrounded by what Frank believed to be angels. They didn't look like the paintings he had seen hanging on church walls and portrayed in stained glass windows. They were huge, powerful creatures, each with many wings. On the right, about 50 feet away, was a large marble platform.

"Come here, Frank," he heard yet another voice call to him. He looked up and saw a man in brilliant clothes, even brighter than the others he had seen, standing

between him and the platform. “Do you know where you are?” he asked Frank in a loud, booming voice. Frank shook his head “no” slowly as he watched the figure approach him.

Frank looked around in amazement. He had never seen the colors and smelled the amazing fragrances that he was experiencing. “Do you know who I am?” the man asked.

“Jesus?” he replied with reverence and fear in his voice.

“No, Frank. I am not even worthy to look into His face. My name is Jadon. I am one of His,” responded the powerful-looking being.

“Do you know why I have brought you to this room?” he asked.

Frank shook his head again, still speechless and dazed with amazement. “Do you see that book?” Jadon asked as he pointed to the marble platform and walked toward it.

He stood next to the massive book and opened its cover. The book looked three feet wide and seven feet tall. The thickness of the book was astounding. It was almost as tall as the angel. “Do you know what this book is?”

Frank had never really believed that Heaven existed, and even if it did, he thought it was a state of being, not a physical place. He stared at the book and shook his head, trying to wake up from what he was confident was a dream.

“Frank, I need to show you something.” Jadon continued, as he pointed to the book. “This is the *Book of Life*. Do you know what that means?”

Frank again slowly shook his head.

“If your name is in this book, you may stay here,” Jadon continued. “If it is not, you may not stay.”

Frank was frozen with a mixture of fear and awe. He was puzzled and stared at the large book, admiring the beauty of it but hoping and wondering if his name was in it.

“Frank, I’m afraid that your name is not listed here.” Frank had never before experienced the overwhelming dread that filled his soul as the words came from Jadon.

“What? There must be a mistake! How can that be?” He felt weak as the weight of these words sank in.

“I was a good person! I did good things. You must know that!” he exclaimed in panic. “I went to church with my wife, I helped people. I gave to the needy. What happened? This must be a mistake!”

He frantically ran onto the platform. Jadon stepped aside and watched as Frank tried to turn the pages of the massive book, but was unable to even lift a page.

“It is not a mistake, Frank,” Jadon replied softly. Frank fell on top of the book and began to sob, as the cold reality of his fate slowly sank in. “Frank, you are right. You did many good things during your life.”

Frank quickly raised his head and begged, "Give me another chance! I'll do better. I'll do whatever you want."

"Frank!" interrupted Jadon, in an earth-shaking voice. Frank froze in fear. Jadon pointed to the book and softly asked, "Why do you think these names are written here?"

"They aren't good people. Some were murderers, thieves and prostitutes. They are from every tribe and tongue among the earth. Some were rich and some were poor. They weren't good, but they are all forgiven."

Frank looked confused as he heard these words.

"They received the gift and were forgiven," continued Jadon as he looked toward the book and effortlessly flipped the massive pages. "Let me show you," he continued. "Paul the Apostle," he read aloud. "Have you heard of him?"

"Sure," replied Frank. "But didn't he write a lot of the Bible?"

"Right," continued Jadon, with a smile. "He was used to record God's Word."

"Well, how can I compete with that?" retorted Frank.

Jadon smiled. "But he was also a hard, cruel man. He killed many followers of Jesus. He tortured and executed them. He ordered others to do the same. You never did any of those things, Frank. By your standards, he wasn't even as good as you. But he was forgiven."

A deeply puzzled look overtook Frank's face.

Turning the massive pages again, Jadon read another name. "King David. He was appointed by God to be the king of Israel. He wrote much of the book of Psalms. He is called 'a man after God's own heart.'"

Frank continued to stare at the book in disbelief.

"But David also killed many people," continued Jadon. "Once, out of lust, he had a man killed so he could have his wife as his own. Not exactly a good person, right?" asked Jadon.

"Right?" Frank asked with confusion.

"But he was forgiven," continued Jadon.

Frank's knees gave way as he felt the heaviness of his looming potential sentence.

Jadon read forty names from the Book of Life. Each time, he described the sinfulness, deceit and corrupted heart that each had. Some were well known and some were simple people from every tribe around the world. And each time he ended their list of sins with, "but they were forgiven."

"Frank, so many people, just like you, think that they are good people. The truth is that no one is really good. God told you in His Word that all people have fallen short, they are all sinners, just by nature."

"What do you mean?" asked Frank, with bewilderment in his voice.

"The times you do things that are against God's will

don't make you a sinner," answered Jadon. "You are a sinner, just by your human nature. And this sinful, human nature is why you do sinful things." (Romans 3:10-12)

He paused and let this truth sink into Frank's heart. "Frank, let me show you something." He walked off the platform and across the room. Frank followed closely, wondering what to expect next. He led Frank to the shining, silver lake and peered in. He pointed to the lake saying, "Look. I will show you your life; the good and the bad."





## Chapter 4

### Obstacles

It seemed as though they stood at the edge of the lake for days, reviewing his life, scene by scene. Everything from a time he stole a candy bar when he was ten to the church picnic he worked at last week was laid before him. Frank was in awe, embarrassed at his cruelty at many times throughout his life, and proud of his many accomplishments and times he had donated his time or money to do wonderful things for others in need.

He watched as his life with Jodi unfolded before him. He saw how the plans for the wedding kept Jodi and him busy over the month before their wedding. Wedding planning, shopping and picking out china were substituted for his Monday night football games with Tim. The caterer, menu, location and seemingly millions of other decisions kept Jodi distracted and stressed.

Despite his unavailability in the evenings and on weekends, Frank and Tim kept their Tuesday tradition alive. It was, as Frank put it, “the only thing keeping him sane”. He would record the games and watch them late on Monday nights, after Jodi went to bed.

The weeks of planning paid off. Their wedding ceremony and reception were amazing. Every detail fell into place, including the string quartet and dessert bar, full of desserts from around the world. It was the hit of the reception and for months after people talked about it.

When they returned from their honeymoon, they were worn out. They packed as much as possible into each day, and their hectic schedule took its toll on them both. In addition, they decided to buy and renovate an old farmhouse in the country, a childhood dream of Jodi’s, but didn’t realize the amount of time and work that this dream would require. Every spare minute seemed to be filled with painting, repairing walls, replacing windows and tiling floors.

They were trying to adjust to married life, but the extra work on the house and longer than usual hours in the office due to the corporate merger began to drive a wedge between them. The excitement of being married and finally having their own house gave them the energy to push through the exhaustion at first, but it would soon dwindle.

Their argument-free life was quickly replaced by shouting matches, spurred by their tireless labor. They found themselves arguing over insignificant things that, under normal circumstances, they would

have easily compromised upon.

His critiques of her style and decorating taste, paired with repetitive comments about the amount she was spending on “insane decorations”, were laying a foundation for disaster. She was quick to retaliate with digs on his lack of skill for home improvements that “any real man” would be able to handle with no problem. Their foundation was beginning to crack, even before it was laid.

Over the next year, details of their house fell into place and their schedules relaxed a bit. They got past insults and moved to compliments and compromise as the pressures of life began to settle out.

Frank’s hard work began to pay off at the office, as the reorganization details placed him in a vice president’s position, responsible for the management of the entire company’s funds.

They both loved their jobs and were happier than they could ever remember. Jodi bought Frank a speed boat for Christmas, a toy that had been a childhood dream.

Jodi was enjoying her position overseeing international marketing. She loved the relationships she was building with the international staff and loved the travel. They had everything and everything was seemingly going their way.

The realization hit Frank that he would never again see Jodi. Tears welled up in his eyes and he looked away from the lake. He tried to step away, but Jadon put his massive arm around him and drew him

back to the water. He peered into the glassy floor once again, not sure what to expect this time.

They planned to wait a few years before having children, wanting to enjoy life together without the distractions of little feet in their home. They were both doing well in their careers and wanted to climb the corporate ladder, get to the top and enjoy the fruit of their labor. But on a chilly Saturday morning in April, their perfect plan would come crashing down on them.

Early in the morning, Frank awoke to the soft sound of Jodi sobbing. Immediately, he threw off the covers and rushed in to see what was wrong with his wife. As his eyes adjusted to the bright bathroom lights, he saw Jodi curled up on the bathroom floor between the vanity and toilet.

“Jodi,” he pleaded. “Are you okay?” He didn’t notice the pregnancy test she was grasping in her left hand as she cried. He bent down and crawled across the floor to meet her, kissed her tear-streaked cheek and her forehead. She melted into his arms.

“It’s going to be all right. I’m here.” His words of comfort didn’t even reach her ears as she exploded with grief, as the reality of the life changes that this would bring.

They had decided that she would stay home with the children so they would get the kind of love and attention that neither of them had received. She knew that their freedom, their lifestyle and the job that she loved would ultimately change completely.

“I was late,” she sobbed. “So I decided to check.” She clenched the test in her hand and held it up. “Oh, honey,” Frank tried to comfort her. “I thought something terrible happened to you. We will get through this.”

“I’m not ready to be a mommy!” she bawled. “I’m just starting my life.”

Over the next two months, Jodi’s grief turned to acceptance as she worked through the eventual losses of her freedom and her position that had become a type of idol for her. As several of her friends encouraged her, she came to accept the change and began to become more excited about the thought of being a mother. As devastating as the news about the pregnancy was for her, she had finally adjusted.

A month later, she was jolted again. After a week of feeling sick and periodic bleeding, she went to Dr. Stephanie Sanders, her ob-gyn. She listened to Jodi’s stomach and had a sorrowful look on her face as she searched for a heartbeat. She immediately performed an ultrasound that confirmed her suspicion. Jodi had lost her baby.

“I’m so sorry.” Her eyes filled with tears of compassion as tears flowed from Frank and Jodi’s eyes. Jodi gripped Frank’s arm and wailed. Frank stood, looking at the monitor in disbelief. “How could this happen?” he sobbed.

“You didn’t do anything wrong,” encouraged Dr. Sanders. “You have to remember that. These things just happen. I’m so sorry.”

“How could this happen? How could this happen?” she wept.

As the doctor left the room to give them some time alone, they held each other. “Why?” sobbed Jodi. “Why did this happen? We’re good people. How could God let this happen to us?”

“I don’t know,” responded Frank as he continued to stare hopelessly into the monitor that was now off. “I really don’t know.” He hugged her more tightly than ever and kissed her cheek as tears fell from both of their eyes.

Over the next year, their marriage began to crumble. Jodi began drinking to dull the pain of regret and blame that she heaped heavily on herself.

*Maybe if I exercised more, maybe if I took more vitamins or something, my baby would have lived,* she thought on a daily basis. Depression began to settle in and her performance at work began to suffer.

Everyone, including Frank, knew that it was just a matter of time before they would replace her. Although he tried to comfort her, Frank was unable to reduce the pain she was experiencing.

They began to drift farther apart as Jodi became less engaged in their relationship. It was as if she turned off her emotional switch to stop the pain from hurting so much. But in turning off the pain, she turned off every emotion and became stoic in every area of life.

As the months passed, more and more emotional walls were built by both of them. In their attempts to dull

their individual pain, they drifted from being a couple who deeply loved each other to two strangers living in the same house, hardly speaking to each other.

Frank spent most of his time at bars and casinos after work and on business trips. He traveled as much as he could to avoid the problems at home, and he grew more cynical and less trusting.

His friendship with Tim practically ended, since Tim was a reminder of what life was once like – happy, carefree and positive. They stopped their weekly lunch meetings and rarely spent time together.

Frank and Jodi were struggling with issues that they never thought would affect them. *Other people have these problems*, they thought. But now it was their turn.

Jodi was fired from her job when her performance drastically declined, but it was possibly the best thing for her. It gave her the wake up call that she needed to reassess her life and to realize that giving up was not an option.

Over the next two years, Jodi slowly recovered from the pain of losing their first child and gained a fresh perspective on life, thanks mainly to a high school friend, Jan, who never gave up on her. Jan truly helped Jodi through the ups and downs over those two years. She had always attended the nearby church, and for the last several years had invited Frank and Jodi to come with her.

Neither she nor Frank were “religious” people and weren’t interested in becoming so. They were good

people who were generous and lived a decent life. After Jodi's miscarriage, Jodi went with Jan for prayer, not knowing what to expect.

She was amazed at the love she received from all of the "strangers" there and began to attend with Jan each week. Frank refused to go with her. He was sure that they were trying to brainwash people into acting in a certain way.

Frank noticed the drastic changes Jodi was making in her outlook on life and realized that she was healing from the wounds of the miscarriage. She was once again becoming the woman he fell in love with.

He stopped betting so much on games, spent more time at home, and traveled less than he used to. He slowly began to trust his wife and let her and others back into his life. They both removed most of the walls that were built, and Frank and Jodi were once again falling in love.

She gained a position with a competitor in the next town, which made for lively dinner conversation. They were finally back to a place where they enjoyed each other's company and looked forward to seeing each other come home from work. They were ready to restart their life.

After three years, they decided that it was time to try to have children. Every month was a roller coaster of emotions. Joy in trying to start a family, anticipation as they waited every month to see if this was the month, sadness as they discovered that they had not conceived.

Five months later, they were successful in conceiving a baby. They were overjoyed, but deep down, scared to death. They were hesitant to let themselves get attached to the idea of having a child, based on their previous experience.

The doctors watched Jodi closely over the next nine months; and her schedule was filled with doctors' visits, ultrasounds and plenty of bed rest. The pregnancy went exactly as planned, and they were blessed with a healthy baby boy.

This time, they decided that child care would be an acceptable option, since Jodi felt strongly about staying at her new job. They enjoyed the challenge of raising a baby and the joy that it brought. Their life was finally just as they had planned. They began to live their dream.

Jadon and Frank watched the years fly by in an instant. They watched Josh grow into the wonderful son that Frank loved so much. They watched life's ups and downs and how they had shaped his character.

Soon they watched his SUV roll down the ditch, throwing Jason from it. He was overcome with sadness. He turned to Jadon and asked, "What happened to Josh? Please tell me he's okay!"

"He will be fine," replied Jadon. Relief filled Frank's heart and showed on his face.

"What about Jodi?" Frank demanded. "Does she know? Is she okay?"

"She will also be fine," replied the mighty angel.

“You’ve had quite a life. You’ve experienced amazing things. You had a wife who loved you, a wonderful child, and were successful in business. You built a life most only dream about. You had it all.”

“Except one thing,” Frank responded as he glanced back to the platform, looking at the book he had begun to hate.

“Why?” he asked again. “With all the good things you just saw that I did, the church activities, the donations. I helped kids in Africa, I gave to the poor. I did everything! It was all a waste. Why?”



## Chapter 5

### Going Through the Motions

Jadon glanced at the pool and shook his head. The scene was so familiar, like it happened yesterday.

It was Super Bowl Sunday. The old wooden pews began to creak on each side of the small church as the congregation shifted in their seats. Pastor Jim looked at the clock on the back wall, and frustration welled up inside of him.

He had only been speaking for about four minutes. It seemed like many of the congregation were distracted that day, paying no attention to the Bible reading or his sermon. It was as if they didn't even want to be there.

He looked out onto a sea of glazed eyes and sports-starved men. Most of them looked as if they were busy thinking about lunch, problems at work and of

course, the game later that day. He stopped talking for about 30 seconds, just to see if someone would notice. All eyes moved sharply away from watches and windowpanes and once again focused on him.

As he scanned the pews, his eyes met Frank's. Frank had been reluctantly attending church with Jodi for almost six months. The events of meeting Frank for the first time quickly ran through his mind.

"Pastor," Jodi said as she brought Frank up to him before the church service began on that warm Sunday morning. "I'd like you to meet my husband, Frank."

Until today, Frank refused to go with her, but finally came to show his support for the change that it seemed to make in her life and attitude.

"It's great to meet you, Frank," replied Pastor Jim as he shook Frank's hand.

"Nice to meet you, too," returned Frank as he gripped the pastor's hand, wishing that he could be anywhere but there. As he went through the normal niceties, Frank was noticeably uncomfortable and seemed to be expecting the usual, 'Why haven't you been here before?' or 'You need to be here every week, you need to do this, and you need to do that.'

To Frank's surprise, Pastor Jim listened politely as Frank gave his opinion of church, declaring that he didn't want anything to do with all of its rules and regulations. He ended his monologue with, "I'm a decent person. No, actually, I'm a good person. A really good person."

“I’m sure you are, Frank,” smiled Pastor Jim. “Tell me, what do you do for work?”

They continued their conversation for a minute or so, and he told Frank about the men’s bowling league that had just started and invited him to join. He remembered seeing the tension release its hold from Frank as he asked about his work and what he liked to do for fun, instead of imposing his beliefs on him. What Frank had expected to be a spiritual interrogation had turned out to be a pleasant conversation.

Frank came with Jodi each week after that and sat in the back of the church. He signed up for the bowling league and turned out to be one of its key players.

A month after he joined the league, one of the men on the bowling team, Jake, told him that several of the guys were coming the following Saturday morning to paint the outside of the church building. He invited Frank to help. Frank agreed and had a great time with the group. It turned out that Frank found the men to be “normal” guys. They liked the same things he liked and followed the same sports teams. He was shocked that these “church guys” were actually fun to be with.

Pastor Jim scanned the rest of the church, looking for people who really wanted to know and follow Jesus. He wondered how many of the members really were attending each week to worship God and to learn about having a deeper walk with Him, and how many were there to check it off their weekly list of things to do. After a few more minutes, Pastor Jim finished his sermon. He gave a blessing and walked toward the back of the church to greet people as they left.

“Have a great week, Pastor,” he heard from several of the members as they walked past him, not even stopping to shake his hand as they headed to their cars.

“See you next week,” Jodi said with a smile as she and Frank walked by.

“See you then,” Pastor Jim replied as he shook Frank’s hand, praying that something would help Frank to see that being good isn’t good enough.

“Sorry we were so late today, Pastor,” declared Frank. “It was my fault. I turned my alarm off and overslept this morning.”

“That’s fine, Frank. I was just happy to see that you both were here today. I was wondering if everything was okay.”

“Yes, everything is fine,” replied Jodi with a smile. “We were just a little behind schedule.”

“That’s good to hear. And it is nice to see you here together.”

“Well,” Frank responded, “coming together makes Jodi happy. It’s a good thing to do.”

“You know, Frank,” began Pastor Jim. “Life isn’t just about doing good things...”

Looking at his watch and realizing they were going to be late for his party, Frank interrupted, “We really need to go, Pastor.” Frank quickly shook Pastor Jim’s hand and bounded out of the church toward his car.

In his rush to leave, Frank didn’t let Pastor Jim finish

his thought. Now that he was watching the scene unfold, he realized how rude he had been.

“I didn’t even listen to him. I didn’t even really care why I was there,” Frank admitted, embarrassed by his behavior.

Jadon answered, “Frank, your life then and your eternal life aren’t all about the good things you did, the church attendance, the donations or even helping kids in Africa.

“It was all about you thinking that you were good, when in reality, by God’s standards, you weren’t. You could never be good enough, simply because you were not perfect. And that is what He demands.” (Matt 5:20, 5:48)

Frank was dazed by Jadon’s comments. *How can God demand that I be perfect?* he thought to himself.

“I will show you a few of your choices that really made a difference,” Jadon continued. “Times that you really could have changed everything.”





## Chapter 6

### The Refusal

Once again, Frank looked deeply into the silver pool. This time he had a blank look on his face. He was confused and disheartened. The silver liquid once again began to show scenes from his life – scenes that he had overlooked the last time. This time he wasn't watching his accomplishments. Instead, he was seeing things he had never seen before, even though they were right in front of him the whole time.

As the image became clear, he saw the private high school that he had attended. He saw himself sitting in Mr. Kendall's history class, talking to Jason and waiting for the class to begin. "Okay, class," began Mr. Kendall. "Take your seats. We need to get started."

Frank recalled that every day his teacher would make one of the students read the Bible and would give an explanation of how he thought it was relevant to

today. Frank, on the other hand, considered it to be a long, drawn out sermon that had nothing to do with anything.

He saw himself with the worn and tattered Bible that day, quickly scanning through the verses before he had to read aloud. He watched himself stumble over the unfamiliar words, only wanting to hand the book back to Mr. Kendall and get on with 'real life'.

"Romans 3:21-26," he heard his younger-self read aloud. "But now apart from the law the righteousness of God (which is attested by the law and the prophets) has been disclosed – namely, the righteousness of God through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction,"

He took a breath and continued with the rest of the passage, hoping for relief, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. But they are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. God publicly displayed him at his death as the mercy seat accessible through faith. This was to demonstrate his righteousness, because God in his forbearance had passed over the sins previously committed. This was also to demonstrate his righteousness in the present time, so that he would be just and the justifier of the one who lives because of Jesus' faithfulness."

"Thanks, Frank," said Mr. Kendall as he took the book back and set it on his desk. "This passage talks about our sin and our need for a Savior."

Frank immediately tuned him out as soon as he began his explanation. He considered his well-meaning

teacher to be too conservative and ‘old fashioned’ in his beliefs. Frank didn’t want his teacher’s ‘radical teachings’ about God and who gets into Heaven to cloud his mind.

He watched himself roll his eyes at Mr. Kendall’s explanation, thinking, *Where does this guy get this stuff?* His thoughts immediately turned to the upcoming football game. The team they were up against had beaten them badly earlier in the season and he hoped it would be different this time.

The scene slowly faded away and changed in the shimmering pool to a day that he now wished he could forget. In his second year at college, he and three of his friends took a trip to the beach for spring break.

Their plans were simple – have fun, drink a lot and blow off steam. He saw himself with his friends on the beach, playing volleyball with three girls they had met the night before at a party. On one side were Jason, Marc and Mary, and on the other were Frank, Tim, Sherry and Liz. As they played, the guys were trying to impress the girls by diving after the ball, landing in the soft, hot sand.

A small group of college students came up to the group during a break in their game and began to talk to them. As they talked, they began asking questions about life, death and Heaven.

Frank and Jason rolled their eyes and began to walk away. One of the guys, Jeff, stopped them and asked about their beliefs. “Well,” began Frank, “here’s my thing. I’ve heard a lot of stuff about this. But it seems like everyone has his own way to find God. The Hindus

have their way, the Muslims have their way, you have yours and I have mine.”

“What is yours?” asked Jeff. Frank glanced over at Jason, who was rolling his eyes. “Mine is simple. Live a good life, be a good person, do what you can for others. That’s all that you need. I don’t need your church stuff, I don’t need your ideas or your guilt or whatever. I’m fine. You don’t have to worry about me.”

“Okay,” replied Jeff. “Can I ask you one more thing? And then I’ll leave you alone.” “Sure,” grudgingly replied Frank. “That would be nice,” added Jason.

“I understand what you’re saying, but if all those ways you talked about are really the same, and get you to the same place, and if all you really need to do is be nice and good, then why is it that God sent His son Jesus to earth to be beaten, hung on a cross, strangled by the weight of His own body and die? Why didn’t God just say, ‘Be a nice person’? If that were the case, the Bible would only have to be one page.”

“And if all those other religions are right,” he continued, “then how come they teach completely different things? If they all were right, they would all agree, don’t you think?”

“Listen,” replied Jason. “I’m not Bible scholar, but I don’t think a God who is supposed to love us would only accept us if we are Christians. That doesn’t make sense.”

“Good point,” continued Jeff. “The Bible actually never says we have to be a Christian.” Frank’s ears perked up. “What do you mean?” he asked curiously.

“Well,” continued Jeff, “the Bible teaches that we all have a sinful nature to start out with. That means we can’t please God and be near Him. So the things we do, even the good things, aren’t perfect – they are corrupted with our sin. And our corrupted good works don’t please Him either. He was left with a tough question. How could there be a perfect sacrifice to make payment for sin?”

“God knew we couldn’t make the sacrifice, because it would be corrupted. So He did it for us Himself, because He loves us. And all we have to do is say thank you, by accepting His free gift. Then He enables us to make changes in our lives and become more like Him. It isn’t about being good. It’s about being forgiven.” (Romans 5:8)

“That all sounds nice,” continued Frank.

“Yeah,” interrupted Jason. “But we’ll be fine. we don’t want your rules and regulations or whatever you have. Don’t worry about us.” Frank shook his head in agreement.

Jason walked over to the cooler and grabbed another beer, offering one to Jeff. “No, thanks,” replied Jeff.

“And no thanks to your religion,” smiled Frank. “Listen, we have to get back to the game, okay? See you around.”

The shimmering pool became black and Frank was lost in thought as he stared into its depths. It once again lightened and a faint image began to come into focus. It was years after he had graduated from college, as he was busy climbing the corporate ladder

at Baker and Dunn with Tim. Tim was a Christian, but wasn't like the others who had tried to talk to him about Jesus. Tim was down to earth, seemed intelligent and in Frank's mind was "normal."

Occasionally, during their weekly sports lunches, they would discuss issues like politics, current events and occasionally God. When Frank's father died eight years before, Tim really tried to help Frank through the hard time and help him see that God was not bad, even though bad things happen to people.

He prayed for him, spent time with him and Jodi, and had meals made for them through his church. He really seemed to care. Frank watched as a day he remembered flashed before him in the silver pool. As he began to watch, he wanted to hide his face because he knew how the scene ended.

"Frank, how are you doing?" asked Tim as Frank walked into the break room. "Fine. I guess," answered Frank as he wandered over to the coffee and filled his mug.

"Did you see the game last night?" Tim asked, hoping to get Frank's mind off what was troubling him.

"No. I missed it," replied Frank. "It seems that I have missed a lot lately!"

"What's going on? You don't seem like yourself." pressed Tim as Frank slid the break room chair over with his foot and flopped into it.

"Well, my life is officially in the toilet!" declared Frank with a sarcastic tone. "I finally did it. I was actually

able to completely destroy my life. I am that good!"

"What happened?" Tim responded as his eyes grew wider and he leaned into the table.

"Jodi is leaving me." Frank offered as he sipped his coffee and shook his head. "She has had enough. Or at least that's what she told me last night as we were arguing again."

"What were you arguing about this time?"

"You know, I like to go out with friends and she doesn't want me to have any fun. It's the same old crap. She's ridiculous. After the miscarriage, it has been crazy. She isn't herself. You know. You see it. It's like I'm in prison. No, I take that back. I think prisoners have more rights than I do!" declared Frank as he slammed his mug down, spilling coffee on the table.

"Hey, I know you haven't had the best relationship lately, but what happened all of a sudden?"

"It wasn't all of a sudden. She has been like this for a while. She gets mad when I go out. She tells me that she has to stay at home alone every night and needs a break from it, but I need a break, too. I work all day and need to blow off steam," Frank explained angrily.

Tim shook his head, affirming his friend's feelings. "Well, I agree. You need some time to have fun, but so does Jodi. She probably is pretty sick of being alone every evening. Why don't you go blow off steam together sometime?"

“Whose side are you on?” questioned Frank, as he slid his chair away from the table, acting like he was going to leave.

“Hey,” interrupted Tim. “I’m not on anyone’s side. I just know that sometimes we need an outsider’s perspective on a situation. And I want to give you mine on this one, that’s all. No sides, no attacking, just let me tell you what I see.”

“Fine!” shouted Frank as he grabbed his coffee cup and took a sip, sliding his chair back in. “What do you think?”

“Well, first let me tell you that marriage is something special. Some of us go through life a long time without it and pray that we will find someone to spend our life with,” began Tim. “It’s a huge blessing and you really shouldn’t forget that. You know that song that says, ‘you don’t know what you’ve got ‘till it’s gone,’ well, it’s right. You still have something really special with Jodi, even though you’re struggling together right now. You should do whatever it takes to make it right.”

“Like what?” Frank insisted. “She told me we’re through. What can I do now? It’s too late.”

“Too late? Are you nuts?” Tim retorted. “Have you ever had a fight and said something you didn’t exactly one hundred percent mean?” Frank nodded his head, “Of course. Who hasn’t?”

“And has Jodi ever done that before?” pressed Tim. “Has she ever said something she didn’t mean?” “Yeah, okay, I get it,” replied Frank. “Kiss and make up, right?”

Well, it doesn't seem that easy. She packed her bag and left to go to her parents' house in Nashville."

Tim looked with compassion at his friend. "Frank, you and Jodi are good friends of mine. I don't want to see you get hurt. All I want to do is help you out and get you two back together – where you belong. But things need to change. There are ways you do things that work and other ways that don't. It seems like you chose the latter one. You need to change the way you are doing marriage."

"Tim," replied Frank with a sigh. "I know you want to help, but you aren't even married. How would you know what can help? Sorry," he sighed again. "I think I need to get back to work."

"Frank, before you go," answered Tim, "you're right. I don't know what it's like to be married. But I know a lot of people get married and try it their own way and get divorced or end up unhappy for their whole lives. I also know there are a lot of people who get married and do it God's way and they are happy, stay together and actually love each other. It's not my ideas that will help you. Only God can help you and bring reconciliation to you and Jodi. I know He wants to, but you have to ask.

"It's just like with heaven," continued Tim. "So many people think that you have a bank account of good and bad deeds, that you get credits and debits, based on what you do. And if you end up in the black, you go upstairs and if you end up in the red, you go downstairs. It really isn't like that at all. It's not about being good or bad, it's about being forgiven by Jesus. All you have to do is ask Him to help you. He paid the

price for your sin so you wouldn't have to. I would love you to..."

"All right, I really have to go now," interrupted Frank. "I was listening, but now you're getting all preachy and turning into a Jesus freak on me. You can keep your religion to yourself. I don't want it, don't need it and certainly don't want to hear about it."

"Tim," Frank concluded as he stood up and began walking out of the break room, "I'll be fine. Forget I mentioned anything. And by all means stop your preaching."

Tim sat, staring into his coffee for a while, wondering how to reach Frank and change his heart, helping him to accept the truth of his need for a Savior.

As Frank watched the scene unfold in the silver lake, he was saddened by the apathy he had displayed. He slowly lifted his head and looked at Jadon. "I'm so sorry," he confessed.

"It is not me that you should be apologizing to." Jadon continued, "Frank, you were given so many chances. Many people are. But you never let the Word penetrate you, Frank. You were convinced that you could save yourself."

"Your works, your giving, being nice to people - your idea of being a good person was fine. But the problem is that you were still a sinful person - just doing good things. You needed Jesus to make you righteous so that your works would be counted."

Frank sobbed as Jadon led him away from the silver

pool and down a hallway. Fear, disappointment and grief gripped him even tighter as they walked. They reached a place that had an enormous double door. It seemed as though it was a mile tall, sparkling with gold and colors that Frank had never seen before. It seemed somehow to have a light of its own, emanating from the huge decorative panels. Jadon took the handle of the door and turned to Frank.

“Are you ready?” he asked.

“Do I have a choice?” choked out Frank. Jadon turned back to the door and pulled it open, leading Frank inside.





## Chapter 7

### The Trial

Jadon put his hand on the handle of the massive door. Frank felt his heart sink inside as the door was pulled open to reveal a brilliant room. *What now?* thought Frank. *Is this the end for me?*

As the huge door was opened, he stepped inside. He was on what looked like a balcony, overlooking a circular room that was more brilliant than the last room. He looked around at the luminous space in amazement. It seemed to go on forever.

Below him was a gathering of even more people than before. It was as if they stretched until the horizon and then some. He felt his knees weaken as the awe of what he was taking in grabbed his heart.

He looked back at Jadon in amazement. Jadon pointed forward, toward the bright, shining center of the

room below. He noticed what appeared to be a throne in the center, with many beings surrounding it. As he looked closer, he saw a judge's seat to the right of the throne. All at once, an angel stood up and blew his trumpet. The enormous group became silent and fell to its faces in reverence.

Frank too fell to his face with a mixture of awe and dread as he saw Jesus enter and proceeded across the room to take His seat. Frank recognized Him instantly, although He looked different than any painting that he had seen of Him. His appearance was dazzling. His face shone like the sun, His clothing was brilliant white with a belt of gold around His waist. His eyes looked like flaming torches, and His legs looked like bronze. Frank couldn't keep his eyes off of Him as He moved across the room.

Despite his overwhelming fear of what he was witnessing and not knowing what to expect, Frank felt a desire to stay exactly where he was. Although they did not communicate directly, it was as if Jesus had personally welcomed him with a loving embrace. Frank was unable to explain the simultaneous feelings of peace and dread. He just knew that he did not want the peace to end – ever!

Jesus took His seat and the crowd stood to its feet. The massive gavel was pounded and Lucifer himself walked into the room. No one announced who he was, but it was evident. As he entered through the south doorway, he walked arrogantly across the room, talking with many of those gathered on the lower floor. Many began to weep as they saw his presence, but Frank did not understand why.

He didn't appear as Frank thought he would. He wasn't ugly. In fact, he was captivating to look at. He had no horns, wasn't red and had no tail. He was a beautiful creature that made you want to be with him. His smile brought both delight and fear. As he approached the center of the floor and walked up to the Judgment Seat, Jesus motioned for him to sit at the small table near Him.

One by one, a list of names was read aloud. Those whose names were announced arose from their places and walked toward the center of the room. Lucifer laughed as many of the names were read, sneering at the people as they sheepishly approached the front, walking past his seat.

The angel stopped reading names and another angel once again blew a trumpet. The first angel read the first name on the list in a powerful voice. One by one, they came to the front, their entire lives were made known to all and they were judged. In what seemed like an instant, tens of thousands came forward, one by one. Then "it" happened and time almost stood still for Frank.

"Jason," declared the mighty angel in a deep, haunting voice. Jason approached the front and stood in front of the Judgment Seat.

"Jason!" shouted Frank as he saw his friend walk toward the front. "What is happening?" he demanded as he turned toward Jadon, who simply pointed to the floor where Jason stood. Jason's face was full of grief and fear as he wondered what awaited him.

An angel approached the seat and began to unravel

a large scroll, reading it aloud. It was an account of Jason's entire life, from beginning to end, both good and bad.

Throughout the reading, many times his face was joyful and proud of the choices that he had made. He reveled in the reading of his thoughtfulness, good deeds and sacrifices he had made for others. The times he helped to feed the hungry, donated to humanitarian causes and volunteered to help those less fortunate were all read. He smiled as the angel read of his church attendance as a child and the many times he followed God's ways. He glanced at Jesus to see His reaction, finding a downcast look on His face.

As the angel began to read of the times he had not followed the will of God, Jason cringed. Everything was now exposed. His failures, his weaknesses and all of his sins were now laid in front of everyone. There was no denying the fact of his offenses. Everything that he was ashamed of doing and wished he could erase was now out in the open.

The angel recounted every time Jason allowed his pride and ego to get in the way of him accepting that he needed what Jesus did on the cross. Every time he told himself that he was good enough on his own, refusing to make Him his true Lord was now laid before everyone. Each time that he thought that he needed to add some of his own good deeds to what Jesus did on the cross was read. As this list was read, his face was downcast and his demeanor changed. He looked like an injured child, needing his mother to console him.

"I was a good person!" Jason tried to shout, but was

unable to speak in the presence of Jesus. He desperately wanted to defend himself and prove that he deserved to be in Heaven, but now understood the Truth of his human condition.

At the end of the reading of Jason's scroll, Lucifer stood to his feet. He approached the center of the floor and began to testify against Jason, accusing him of each of his sins and citing every instance that the angel had read when he denied needing Jesus, both publicly and in his heart. He showed how Jason thought that his good deeds would somehow help him get to Heaven.

Lucifer even recounted a recent conversation with Frank and Tim. Tim had tried to explain how to be sure you were going to Heaven. "It's not about being good or following some set of morals," Tim demanded. "It's about being in a relationship with God. It's about being forgiven."

Jason laughed at Tim's explanation, retorting, "Listen, God is loving, right? And He wants us to love others and be good people. So I'm all set."

Frank's eyes widened as he recalled the conversation three months ago. "I agreed with him," Frank quietly sobbed, as he considered what his list would include when his name is called.

At the end of the enormous list of offenses, Lucifer shouted, "This man is a disgrace!" as he pointed his finger toward Jason. "He has blasphemed against the Creator! He has broken almost every law that You established," turning toward the throne.

Frank couldn't help but think about his own life as he witnessed the angel go through Jason's with a fine toothed comb. *What will he say about my life?* he began to think. His mind wandered back through his life, searching for significant moments when he actually followed the principles of God.

He realized that his life bore an eerie resemblance to Jason's. Despite the countless opportunities to accept Jesus' forgiveness, his pride and arrogance had kept him from admitting that he needed it.

His thoughts sprang back to the present moment as Lucifer raised his voice, "You Yourself have said," turning toward Jesus, "that if anyone breaks any of the Law, he is guilty of breaking ALL of the Law!"

He took a few steps closer toward Jason. "Certainly," he continued while his eyes pierced Jason's eyes, "it is easy to see that this man is guilty of *personally* breaking almost every law himself, not to mention breaking them in spirit!"

Lucifer stepped closer to the bench and raised his hand, pointing at the Judge. "You MUST, based simply on Your own character and the Law that You ordained before time began, find this man guilty and turn him over to me!"

At that, Jesus arose from His seat. "Enough!" He shouted in a voice that loudly echoed in the great room and shook the very ground it was built upon. "Sit down!" He demanded of Lucifer. Lucifer walked slowly toward his seat and pointed to Jason.

"He is not worthy of You!" Lucifer shouted toward the

throne as he walked back to his seat. “He is mine!”

Jesus walked toward Jason, looked into his eyes and continued, “My dear creation, you have truly sinned against Me.”

Jason melted with dread and remorse. “Not only did you do things I commanded you not to do, but you refused to do things I asked of you. Worse still, you insisted that you could earn My favor on your own. You had so many chances to take My payment for your sins. You had chances to repent and chose not to.”

Jason’s head sank as he heard Jesus’ speech. Jesus continued, “You did many good deeds while you were still on Earth, but how did you think that you – an imperfect human – could earn your way to perfection? For you heard that my Word says that, *For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God; it is not from works, so that no one can boast.*

“You dared to think that your works could make you acceptable to Me? You heard that I demand perfection and you insisted that you did not need My payment for your sins and refused to make Me your Lord. You rejected My gift of salvation.”

Pointing toward the upper room that Frank had just been in, Jesus continued, “And this is why your name is not in My Book. That is the only reason.”

Frank’s eyes widened as the realization of the meaning of the Book of Life hit him.

Jesus bellowed His verdict with sadness in His heart.

“Guilty!” His voice shook the room once again and the gavel was pounded.

Satan hissed with excitement as he heard Jesus’ words condemn Jason. A hush fell over the great cloud of witnesses as Jesus walked back to His seat.

“Depart from Me, for I never knew you,” demanded Jesus. Turning to the guards, He added, “Take him away from Me!”

At that, two massive angels took Jason away from the crowd. As he was dragged, he screamed in terror, “No! Someone please, help me! No!”

The two angels led him away from the sight of Jesus for all eternity. His heels fell into the two narrow grooves worn into the brilliant floor by the millions that had gone before him.

Satan’s face beamed with joy as he saw Jason being dragged away.

The first angel came to the front of the room and called out another name on his list in a powerful voice and the crowd fell silent as that person walked up to the front and took his place. Once again, a scroll was brought forth and was read.

Frank listened to this man’s life, but he couldn’t stop looking in amazement toward the grooves that Jason’s feet filled.

*How could this be?* he thought.

“We must go,” interrupted Jadon. “It is time.”

As Jadon led Frank through the massive door, Frank glanced back for a moment to see Jesus. Jesus looked up and His magnificent eyes caught Frank's. It was only for a brief instant, but the penetrating power and peace that Frank felt made it feel like it lasted a lifetime.

Jadon grabbed Frank's arm. "We have to go!" he demanded. As the door slammed shut, Jadon looked at Frank's disappointment that was heavy on his face. He put his arm around Frank and led him away from the door, toward the pool. "Come with me," Jadon gently said.

"Where are we going?" asked Frank with a worried tone in his voice.

"We need to go to the lake one last time," replied the angel.

"Why?" asked Frank. "Haven't I already seen enough? We've already seen what my life was like."

"I want to show you how clear the water is now," replied Jadon when they got to the edge of the glimmering lake.

"Clear water?" asked Frank, puzzled.

"Yes," responded Jadon. He pointed into the center of the lake and Frank gazed into it once again. "See, the water is very, very..."

He reached out and touched Frank's chest with his hand and pushed him into the lake and shouted...

“...CLEAR!...”

“...shouted Jim, the ambulance paramedic, as he stood over Frank’s body in the back of the ambulance.

He once again jolted Frank’s body with electricity, hoping to shock his heart back into action. The jolt of electricity rushed through Frank. “He’s coming back!” Jim declared as the monitor began to beep. “He’s back!”

Jim continued to shout some instructions to the other paramedic and put down the paddles.

Leaning over to check Frank’s breathing, he whispered to Frank, “You’re gonna be okay, buddy. You’re going to be fine.”



## Chapter 8

### Recovery

The ambulance screeched into the emergency area of the medical center, and Jim threw open the doors and jumped to the ground. Soon, Frank's bloody body, riddled with IVs and still attached to monitors, was rushed through the entrance.

"Frank!" screamed Jodi as she saw her husband from a distance. She left the curtained area where her son was and ran to see her husband. "You're alive! Thank God!"

"Where's Josh?" gasped Frank with fear in his eyes. "He's okay" replied Jodi as she grabbed him and kissed his bloody face.

"Josh will be fine. Thank God you're okay."

Frank struggled to smile at the sound of his wife's

voice. "I l-o-ve you," he managed to get out before his eyes began to grow dim once again as Jim pushed him past Jodi. "Ma'am, please stay here." The nurse who was taking care of Josh came out and helped Jodi back to her son's bedside.

"He's going to be okay, Ma'am. Please, stay with your son. He really needs you to be strong right now." The ambulance team wheeled Frank toward surgery as the nurse quickly closed the curtain to Josh's area. "Your daddy is going to be okay," Jodi whispered as she embraced Josh and began to cry.

Two hours later Dr. Chambers slowly opened the curtain to reveal Jodi looking lovingly at her sleeping boy. "Doctor!" she exclaimed as she saw him enter. "How's Frank?"

"Ma'am," Dr. Chambers replied, "He is out of surgery and in the recovery room. He has several broken bones and some serious injuries, but he should be fine. You will be able to see him in about an hour. He is a lucky man."

"I consider him blessed, not lucky," replied Jodi. "There have been a lot of people praying for him."

"Well, either way, he should be fine. I'll have the nurse come and get you when you can see him."

An hour later, Jodi was escorted into the recovery room. Frank lay on the hospital bed in a deep, drug-induced sleep. "Can he hear me?" she asked the attending nurse.

"Probably not, but he should wake up soon. Feel free

to talk to him. Maybe he can hear you and it will wake him up. He's a lucky guy." Jodi smiled as she moved a chair next to his bed and sat down.

"Frank?" she softly whispered as she stroked his hair. "Sweetheart, if you can hear me, I want you to know that I love you so much!" she said as tears ran down her cheeks. "So many people are praying for you. I know you are going to be okay."

"His eyelids just moved!" she whispered to the nurse checking his pulse. "That's good," she replied. "Maybe he is ready to wake up. His vitals look good. We just have to wait for the anesthesia to wear off." She walked toward the door and asked Jodi, "Do you want me to get you anything?"

"No, thanks. I'm fine," she replied, looking back toward Frank.

Two hours later, light began to slowly enter and fill Frank's eyes. He closed his eyes tightly as the overhead lights glared down on him.

"Honey?" Jodi asked, as she saw his head move to the side, trying to avoid the light.

Frank groaned in response, not ready to form words. Jodi bent over the bed and kissed him. "Welcome back!" she whispered. "I love you." Frank tried to reply, but was unable to form the words "I love you." Instead, he created a series of three short grunts, but Jodi knew what they meant.

"Thank God you are okay," she sobbed as she hugged him tighter than ever. She sat with him over the next

half hour or so, talking to him and waiting for him to fully wake up from the drug-induced sleep.

Shortly after, the anesthesia wore off and he was able to sit up as Jodi held a straw and a small plastic cup full of water to his lips. "I was so worried. I couldn't imagine what happened when I heard the screech" Jodi recalled. As the memory flashed in his mind, Frank suddenly remembered Josh.

"Josh!" he struggled out, with dread in his voice and eyes. "Is he okay?"

"He's fine," comforted Jodi. "He is resting in the room down the hall. He is fine."

"Thank God!" declared Frank. "I would never have been able to forgive myself if something had happened to him." As he finished that statement, his experience with Jadon flooded back into his memory. Jodi saw the look of amazement and wonder in his eyes. "Are you okay?" she asked.

As he recalled his experience, he thought about Jason's fate and the look of amazement drained from his face and was replaced by sadness and disappointment.

"Jason is dead," he said in a faint voice.

Surprised by the statement, Jodi replied with tears welling up in her eyes, "I'm so sorry. They tried everything they could, but he lost too much blood." Tears once again fell from her eyes. She had been with Jason's wife Rebecca for over an hour as she wept and grappled with the loss of her husband and best

friend.

Tears welled up in Frank's eyes as he recalled Jason being dragged away from his sight.

"Frank, please listen to me. This was not your fault. These things just happen. Please..."

"I'll be okay," he interrupted in a strained voice as he choked back tears. He knew then without a doubt that it wasn't a dream.

He wondered how he could still feel the amazing peace and love in his soul from the momentary glance of Jesus at a time of such sorrow.

Once again he drifted into sleep.

An hour later, he awoke and was able to sit up and drink some water. Jodi stayed with him, keeping him company, trying to think of something to say that would console him over the loss of his friend. After he regained some strength, he looked at his wife and smiled.

"Jodi," he stumbled. "I have to tell you something."

"What is it?" she asked as she bent over to hear him better.

"You won't believe me, but I have to tell you," he added.

"It's okay. You can tell me anything," she added to console him as she bent over and kissed him gently on the cheek.

“I was... dead. I was in Heaven,” he softly said as he continued to recall the events.

“What?” asked Jodi, being surprised by the comment. “What do you mean?”

“I know it sounds crazy, but I know it wasn’t a dream,” Frank continued with a weak voice. “I died. I was in Heaven. I saw it. I can’t even describe it.” He tried to sit up more, to describe it to Jodi, only to feel his head hit his pillow as his arms gave out beneath him.

“Okay, settle down,” Jodi said, helping him to lie back down. “You have had a lot of drugs, sweetie. It will be okay. Just try to relax.”

“You don’t understand,” insisted Frank, struggling to get out each word he spoke. “In the ambulance. I remember. They lost me. Go ask them.”

“Okay,” comforted Jodi. “It will be okay.”

“Go ask them now!” demanded Frank.

“Okay. I’ll go ask. I will be right back,” she replied as she set down his cup of water and walked slowly toward the door. She looked back at him and paused for a moment before leaving to find the doctor.

A few minutes later, the door slowly opened. Jodi had a strange, contemplative look on her face. “I was right, wasn’t I?” Frank asked with a seriousness she had not seen in a while.

“Y-e-s,” responded Jodi slowly as she thought of the impossibility of what he had told her. “They said that

they lost you for about a minute.”

“Honey,” Frank continued. “You have to believe me. I was in Heaven. I can’t explain it.”

Jodi slowly walked over to his bed and looked intently into his eyes. “You *were* there, weren’t you?” she asked. “Your eyes... there is something different in them.”

”Jodi,” Frank exclaimed, “I’m not the same guy that left the house that day to go fishing.”

“What do you mean?”

“I can’t deny what is real any more. I can’t just go on living like I used to. My life is not the same. Now I know that God is real. It’s not just Sunday morning story-time, like I thought. Heaven is real. Jesus is...” Tears began to well up in his eyes.

Jodi pulled up a chair and sat beside him. “Jesus is what?” she gently asked.

“He’s more real than you or I am,” he answered. “Today...” He paused to collect his thoughts and choke back the tears. “He became my God. When I finally woke up, I laid here in bed and prayed. I asked Him to give me the gift, so that He would be able to accept me as His own. I don’t want to end up like Jason and the thousands of others I saw. I want to be able to stay in Heaven forever.”

“Thank God!” Jodi exclaimed as she hugged him tightly and kissed his cheek. “I have been praying for you for so long, that God would show you that He is

real and that you would accept Jesus.”

“You have to be careful what you pray for!” Frank smiled.

“I finally get it. All along I thought I didn’t need Him. ‘I’m a good person, I do good things,’ I always said. But that’s not how it works. It isn’t what life’s about.

“Every good thing I ever did still never made me perfect, just kept me ‘good’. But you have to be perfect. It’s like we all need someone to pay the balance. We all have a shortfall in our account. On a scale of 1 to 100 you might be really good, even a 90. You only owe 10, but you still owe. You might owe 10 or you might owe 50. Everyone owes something, no matter how good you are. You can never be perfect. I finally get it.”

“I always thought,” he continued with passion in his voice. “that if I was better than the next guy I was covered. But it’s not the way it is. We all fall short. Tim’s been trying to tell me that for years. I always blew him off. When I get out of here, I have to call him. I have to tell him what I saw!”



## Chapter 9

### Your Choice

Imagine if you were in an accident today, rushed to a hospital in the back of an ambulance and didn't make it. What if you never received the second chance that Frank did?

Picture what it would feel like to realize your name was not in the Book of Life. Will you leave this life and join so many in eternal pain?

Are you like Jason? Do you think you are good enough to “make it into Heaven”?

Many people have heard Jesus called “the Savior of the World.” They think that since He is the world's Savior and they are in the world, they're covered.

Many have heard that Jesus loves them. And He does. But, they think that since He loves them, He

will reward them for their good deeds and won't punish them for their sins. They think that He is all love and forgiveness, without discipline and rules. The truth is that He is a perfect balance of both.

Often, we compare ourselves to others and find that we are "better" than someone else. But God doesn't compare you to other people. He compares you to Himself – perfection.

In archery, if you missed the bull's eye, even by a little, the judge would yell, "Sin!" The word "sin" literally means "to miss the mark." Even if you hit the black ring around the bull's eye, it wasn't good enough. It is the same with God and our sin.

All of us have a shortfall. Some have a large debt and some have a small debt, but we all owe. And we can never do enough to cover the debt on our own. No matter how many "good deeds" you do, that's all they are – good. They aren't perfect.

Your life isn't like a checking account, where your good deeds balance your bad deeds. Some people try to end at a balanced life, doing enough good deeds to balance out the bad deeds. The problem is that the sinful deeds aren't the real issue.

While we all need to be forgiven of our sins, it is our human nature that needs fixing, not the deeds. Your human nature – what the Bible calls your "heart" – needs to be fixed. If you didn't have a sinful human nature, you would not have done the bad deeds to begin with.

Jesus came, lived a perfect life, died on a cross and rose from the dead. He is willing to credit you His life

in exchange for your sinful, human nature. He is willing to take your place and receive the punishment for your sin. Imagine that!

Jesus said that you have to be born again to enter into His Kingdom. (John 3:3) Jesus wasn't talking about joining a particular type of church. Being born again speaks of Jesus giving you a spiritual, godly nature. We die to our old nature and we are "reborn" with His nature through His Holy Spirit. This is the only way that we are able to please God and spend eternity with Him in Heaven.

Other religions or beliefs won't fix the problem. Jesus was not just a good moral teacher. He did not come to teach us how to be good people. You can follow all of His teachings every day of your life, but without accepting that you have a need and receiving His gift on the cross, you will still have your human nature and end up short.

Other religious leaders and teachers did not die for you. They did not rise to life again from the dead in order to give you life. They are just people, like you and me, in need of their own Savior. Their teachings may help you live a good life, but that life will ultimately bring you in front of God for judgment.

The Bible is clear that receiving Jesus Christ is the only way to Heaven. It says, "*there is one God and one intermediary between God and humanity, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself as a ransom for all, revealing God's purpose at his appointed time.*" (1 Timothy 2:5-6)

Furthermore, Jesus told His disciples that He was going to Heaven to prepare a place for them. One of His disciples asked Him how they can know the way to Heaven and Jesus replied, *“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you have known me, you will know my Father too.”* (John 14:6-7).

You may attend church, give to the poor and do countless good things, but without accepting Jesus’ payment, you will still have a sinful nature and the sin debt that goes along with it. The Bible tells us that, *“For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God; it is not from works, so that no one can boast.”* (Eph. 2:8-9).

Jesus invites you to accept what He has already done for you as payment of your sins and make Him the Lord of your life. You can do that right now and experience this transformation and the peace that He will bring to your life.

Simply confess your sins to God (agreeing with Him that you are not perfect and have sinned), repent (turning away from sin), and accept what Jesus has done for you by faith. You are asking that God would credit Jesus’ work to you.

Friend, it is the most important decision you will ever make! I encourage you if you have never done so to go before God and acknowledge that you are a sinner and ask for Jesus to come into your life and make you a new person - a new creation, a part of His family (2 Corinthians 5:17)!

You can do that right now. Ask God to forgive your

sins and credit Jesus' perfect life and work to your life. A suggested prayer follows, but God is interested in your heart - the words aren't important.

*Lord Jesus, I recognize that I am not perfect. I am a sinful person and can never pay for my own sin debt. I need You. Thank You for dying on the cross for my sins. I open my life to You and receive You as my Savior and my Lord. Thank You for forgiving my sins and giving me a new nature, so I can have eternal life. Take control of my life and live through me. Make me the kind of person You want me to be. Amen.*

Did you pray that prayer with sincerity, truly accepting Jesus as your Lord and Savior, by faith? If so, I welcome you into the family of God! Today is truly a special day, for you have entered into a personal relationship with God.

Your sin has been removed as far as the east is from the west. When God looks at you from this point on, He will no longer see the sins you have done or the sins you will do in the future. Instead, He will see the blood of Jesus, that washed you clean. You are a new creation and are now a child of God!

Today is the beginning of a new life for you. But it is only the beginning. Jesus wants us all to grow deeper in our relationship with Him and become more like Him. This is what Bible teachers call "sanctification."

To learn how you can grow in this new relationship, find a local church that teaches from the Bible every week and join it. Start spending time with other Christians and begin to read the Bible and pray daily.

Do these things, not as a way to earn points with God, but in order to learn more about who God is and to live in community with other believers who can help you along in your journey of faith. You can also visit [www.jesuswho.org](http://www.jesuswho.org) to help you get started.

Your life should reflect the change that has happened to your nature. By living your life for Him every day, you put your faith into action and become a witness to His salvation. Now that you have accepted Jesus as your Savior, you have been given His Holy Spirit to empower you to live the life that Jesus desires for you. He wants you to follow Him every day of your life, in every situation. Jesus taught that we should abide in Him, drawing our strength from Him every day.

A great way to begin following Jesus is to read the New Testament to find out who Jesus is and what He taught His followers. You can do this by starting with the Gospel of John.

Pray that the Lord would open your mind to His truth in the scriptures and that you will become who he desires you to be. As a child of His, He desires your life to be different than it was before.

If you have been a Christian who has fallen into complacency in your spiritual walk, or has sinned and are not sure what to do, you can refresh your relationship with Jesus right now by once again submitting your life to His Lordship.

Jesus told of how a shepherd would leave his flock of 99 sheep to go out and seek after the one that was missing. Right now He is calling to you, desiring that you would come back into His fold.

You can come back right now by confessing (agreeing with God about your sin) and repenting (turning from your rebellion and turning back to God and His ways). Ask Him to forgive you for the times when you did not truly follow Him and accept, by faith, that Jesus' work on the cross has already paid for the sin. Receive His forgiveness by faith and He will be faithful to answer your prayer and breathe new life into you and your walk with Him.

Just as we are saved by grace, through faith, we are able to reconnect with God through faith as well. By doing this, we are able to maintain a close walk and relationship with God, not letting our sin get in the way of our spiritual walk. Paul said that he needed to "die daily" to his sinful nature and allow God to work in and through him. We are able to do the same through this process of confession and acceptance of His forgiveness.

I pray that you take the next steps to help you grow in relationship with Him. By doing so, you can truly walk in His power, fulfill your calling and become a devoted disciple of Jesus.

One way to learn how to grow in your new life in Jesus Christ and learn several basic principles of how to live daily as a follower of Jesus, order a copy of my book, "Destiny of Discipleship" at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

This story-based book will gently lead you through several principles that will greatly impact your walk with Jesus and prepare you for the exciting journey of following Him.

I pray that as you begin to live out your new life in Christ, you will make it a priority to grow daily in relationship with Jesus. I pray that you will read His Word and learn how to walk with Him.

May God bless you, *Eric Foster*



Eric, his wife Allison and son Joshua, reside in Orlando, Florida. They are missionaries with Campus Crusade for Christ and serve with The JESUS Film Project; a ministry that focuses on bringing the message of the Gospel to people around the world in their own language.

Eric and Allison are committed to developing culturally relevant discipleship resources for people around the world that currently do not have them.

They want to see that every new follower of Jesus is given an opportunity to grow in their faith and fulfill their calling.

You can find out more about their ministry and sign up to receive their monthly e-newsletter by visiting their website: [www.ericandallison.org](http://www.ericandallison.org)

Has this book been a blessing to you? If so, why not share it with someone you know.