

Desolate Places

Introduction

In life, there are many things that God prepares us for, both great and small; however, preparation for greater things often requires that we visit desolate places. When you look at Scripture, you will see men like Elijah who had to go to the brook Cherith and Moses who had to journey through the wilderness. Even Jesus went to the wilderness to be tempted. It is in these desolate places where our faith is developed, our relationship with God is nurtured, and where we begin to discover more of His complete plan for our lives. It's in these desolate places where we are often faced with a choice between despair and hope, where we face our darkest fears, and in doing so, find ourselves becoming unbreakable.

It is my hope that as you read this account of the desolate places I have been to, you will be inspired, encouraged, and see the greater picture of what God is doing in your life. If you find yourself in a desolate place, realize that God has a greater plan for you. Often, to be a successful person whom God can fully and completely use, you first need to be broken down to be built back up.

As I share with you the journey of my own life, you will see many examples of this taking place.

You will see tragedies I have faced, and the triumphs that have come about on the back side of those tragedies. You will see how certain situations throughout my life have been used to prepare me for challenges up ahead, and how God used those challenges to open doors for me that would otherwise have never been opened. It's my hope that you will draw closer to God, your heart will be encouraged, your spirit will be lifted, and you will find a new motivation for moving forward in the things that God has called you to.

Chapter 1 – It All Begins With “Yes”

It all begins with the word “Yes.”

When I was fourteen years old, I said, “yes” to God. At the time, I felt that He was asking me to surrender my life fully to Him by committing to serve in vocational ministry when I became an adult. At the time, I didn't know if that meant being a pastor or a missionary pilot (both things very much intrigued me). Little did I know it then, but I was saying “Yes” to a deeper purpose for my life that was put in place long before I ever drew my first breath: a call from God. This call was so much more than a vocational direction. It would ultimately be the legacy that I will leave when my life is finished. I feel compelled to tell you the story of the desolate places that God has taken me through in life not to alarm you or to scare you, but in order that you can see the journey – the path that saying “yes” has taken me on.

Fast forward to the year 1995. I was a young man, twenty-four years old, and had been running from God for the past couple of years. A few poorly chosen words from leaders in the church mixed with the arrogant independence of a rookie police officer to create a poisonous cocktail of bitterness and resentment that would rapidly poison my soul. I had left the church, deciding that I could be a “good Christian” without all the church politics and interpersonal conflicts that took place within the local church. Despite my success as a police officer for a small department in inner-city Fort Worth, I had

made a real mess of my personal life. Once I stopped my running, I felt certain God would not be able to use me for any type of ministry. It was during this time that my oldest son was getting ready to turn five years old, starting kindergarten the following year, and I didn't want to raise him in Dallas/Fort Worth, as it was a major metropolitan area that had many things that my wife and I felt made it a less than ideal environment for raising a young child.

I found my heart longing for wide open spaces. My partner on the night shift and I had taken a trip to Ouray, Colorado the year before and it had given me a whole new appreciation for small towns and the beauty of nature. I looked at several rural police departments, sheriff's departments, and other law enforcement agencies in North Texas to see how viable it was to make a move. Although I interviewed with several agencies, no employment offers were ever made.

After giving considerable thought and prayer to the future, my wife and I felt that it was time to begin looking beyond Texas. I had grown up in Oklahoma and Kansas, plus we had family in both states, so the search turned northward. I knew that my five years of police experience in a major metropolitan area combined with the numerous awards I had received would make me very appealing to a smaller agency. The search process took me to places as far as Boulder, Colorado and Lincoln, Nebraska. Ultimately the search came down to two agencies in Ponca City, Oklahoma (the town I had lived in until I was 10 years old) and Dodge City, Kansas. The Ford County Sheriff's Office in Dodge City, Kansas was one of the two agencies taking a serious look at me. I had been to Dodge City when I was a child,

about five or six years old. In fact, my Dad and I flew out there for his first solo flight as a private pilot. I had very few memories of the city, except the fact that it had been an old west cattle town and the old buildings had been restored at a place called “Boot Hill.”

Dodge City is an interesting place. As I traveled out for my interview, I remember smelling the city twenty minutes before seeing it. You see, even a hundred years later, Dodge City is still a cattle town marked by several meat packing plants and several large cattle feed yards, which is why you can smell it before you can see it. Cattle is still the number one industry in Dodge City. As I sat down for my interview, the sheriff asked, “Do you know what that smell is, Carl? It's the smell of money.” What a first impression!

Dodge City was the foulest smelling and dirtiest town I had ever been to in my life. The thought of living there made me want to quickly explore my other options. On my drive back to Texas I made sure to stop at the police department in Ponca City, Oklahoma – just to see if I could nudge their process along a little faster. Unfortunately, their hiring decision was being held up by a wrongful termination lawsuit which would that would not be resolved anytime soon.

Upon arriving back in Texas, I told my wife all that I had observed and smelled. I made it clear that there was no way we would be moving to Dodge City, Kansas. Well, since then, I've learned never to say “never” or “always.” God has a way of proving both of those words useless and incorrect. I'm not so sure that He doesn't get some humor of those statements wrong. After a few months and several

interviews, the only offer left on the table was in Dodge City. In June of 1995, my wife, son, and I left Texas and traveled to Kansas. We settled into a small town fifteen minutes southwest of Dodge City called Ensign. Our arrival to town grew the population from two-hundred to two-hundred-and-three. The town was marked by a farm implement store, a small café (which would close six months later), a post office, and a blinking yellow light on the highway. It was my first major step into desolate places.

As I spent the coming months in Dodge City, I quickly lost the love for my profession. That had been my greatest pride behind my wife and son. I had arrived there thinking I would retire as a sheriff's deputy, spending the next fifteen to twenty years in utter bliss. Wide open spaces and police work...what more could a guy ask for? I even fancied the idea of running for Sheriff at some point. I quickly discovered that I didn't fit in, and Dodge City, for me, was far from living the dream. In many ways, it became my own private hell on earth. I was the "big city cop" and all my accolades and experience were not received warmly. I was constantly being criticized by guys I didn't respect and I was equally critical of them as well. Within a couple of years, I found myself wanting a change. The first thing that came to mind was to remain in law enforcement, simply elsewhere. I started discussions to make a lateral transfer to the Dodge City Police Department, but those were thwarted when a new Chief of Police came to town. I even returned to Texas and had preliminary conversations with my former department about coming back should a position come open, but that never materialized either. Despite my dislike for my co-workers and the office politics, I had become an instructor in our Citizen's Police Academy and Reserve Deputy Academy. These were both things I thoroughly enjoyed. I also spent a semester as an

adjunct professor at Dodge City Community College teaching Microsoft Office (which was ironic, because I had neither a college degree or any formal computer education that was relevant). I got the job when a friend from church, who was a computer instructor gave my name to the faculty coordinator. Little did he know I had only gotten my first computer two years earlier when my dad gave me a Windows 386 (I had always sworn I would never be a computer guy like my dad who was a data processing manager for a bank in Wichita, Kansas). I quickly learned that I had a great love for teaching, and decided to expand my career search to include instructor positions in the Highway Patrol Academy or one of the other state police academies. In the meantime, I began tinkering with an online job search business and a computer technician business. I had started my first business, a police equipment company, when I was in Texas and entrepreneurship had been an interest of mine since high school.

I had returned to regular church attendance about a year prior to moving to Kansas and since arriving in Dodge City had become very active in our local church. At church, I was fortunate to be surrounded by a group of men who were a lot more like me than the ones I worked with. They were mostly men in their late twenties and early thirties, and we made for an interesting crowd. Among the group was a defense attorney, a mortician, a probation officer, and myself. We often joked that on any given week we were likely to have dealings with the same people in our professional lives. One day a week I had lunch with these guys in the conference room at the attorney's office. We would spend the time speaking about our lives, what God was doing in them, the kinds of husbands and fathers we had been during the prior week, and things of that nature.

Over time, I began to see major changes taking place in my life in a way that left me amazed at God's power to transform a man's life. During my years in police work, I had developed a pretty foul mouth. Almost every sentence I spoke was filled with curse words that just seemed to flow without restraint. I had tried time and time again to clean up my language, with no success. This was an area of my life I asked my friends to pray with me in. We also agreed to spend time reading the Bible every day and held each other accountable for this daily discipline. It wasn't long before I noticed a significant change was taking place. My language was changing. The cursing diminished rapidly and then miraculously was gone. I continued to read a chapter of the Bible daily (a habit I carry on to this day), and even passed this habit down to my son. One morning I didn't hear him, so I went to his room and found him lying on the floor with his Bible open in front of him. When I asked him what he was doing, he said: "I see you do this and I wanted to do it too." That is one of my most treasured moments as a father. During this time, I also felt that I should be doing more for God than warming the church's pews and simply showing up to the weekly activities. From then on, I started mowing the lawn, greeting church visitors, helping the pastor with whatever there was to help with. As time progressed, my attorney friend decided to relocate to Topeka, Kansas and I was asked to teach a Sunday school class. Although I didn't feel worthy to be teaching, I felt that this was a way I could at least serve at a deeper level than mowing the lawn.

After I had been teaching Sunday School a few months, there came a day when the church decided to appoint new deacons to serve the church body. One Sunday as I arrived at church, Dean

Beason – a man very much like a second father to me – suggested that he would like to submit my name as a candidate for becoming one of those deacons. How could that be? It wasn't that long ago that I had been running from God. I felt as though I had forfeited any opportunity I had to serve in any "official capacity." I told him that I wasn't ready to serve in that capacity, and there was so much in my life that simply wasn't right. There were other people better suited for this sort of thing.

Then Dean spoke...

"Carl, if your excuse for not serving is because you're not ready, you will never serve. You'll always run from God because you believe things in your life aren't good enough. There's never a time when you're completely ready."

With that, he handed me my bulletin for the day, smiled at me, and walked away.

In life, I find fascinating those 'destiny-moment' conversations that last no longer than a couple of minutes, yet change your life forever. This conversation was one of those. Many years later I mentioned this conversation to Dean, he laughed and admitted that he didn't even remember having it.

As I look back, I know beyond the shadow of a doubt that Dodge City was a significant part of God's plan for my life after all. It was the place that God stirred my heart to make some radical and unforeseen changes.

I had begun actively interviewing for a new position with other law enforcement agencies outside of Dodge City. We were expecting our second child in late October, so my motivation to move on had

intensified greatly. I had an interview scheduled with the Kansas highway patrol, and had also been interviewing with other agencies to operate in a leadership capacity such as chief of police or some other senior position. One Sunday, when I was at church, an older woman, who taught my son in Sunday School, came up to me and said, “Would you consider coming down to the bank? We're looking for a loan officer, and you know a lot of people in town. I think you'd be good at it.”

I didn't have a college degree (I dropped out of college after my wife and I got married), I had no banking experience, and so, I didn't think anyone would take me seriously. As things turned out, the man interviewing me took a liking to me, and in a matter of days I had a job offer from the bank to join them as a loan officer. I discussed it with my wife and the prospect of not having to move again was very appealing to her. We loved our church family and despite the less desirable aspects of Dodge City, it now felt like home. In a step of faith, I turned in my resignation as a full-time law enforcement officer (I stayed on as a reserve deputy sheriff for another year) and moved into the world of banking.

In the summer of 1998, my parents came to visit us over a weekend. While they were visiting, my mom fell deathly ill and ended up in intensive care at the hospital. On the way to the hospital my mother's vital signs began to drop and the emergency personnel thought she would not survive. As I sat there in the waiting room with my pastor, he began telling me, “My family and I are going on vacation in two weeks, and I need someone to fill in for me at the church – I don't know what I'm going to do.”

Before I had any time to think of what I was getting myself into, I said, “I'll do it. I'll preach.”

Thinking back, I believe that God had a big smile on His face that day, and regardless of how many times I detoured with my own plans, I had, in some way, never deviated from the bigger plan He had in store for me. He had revealed His calling on my life when I was fourteen years old, and fourteen years later He was taking me up on my earlier commitment, I was going to be preaching my first sermon. That day, something in my heart stirred up – a feeling within me unlike anything I had felt before – and I knew with all certainty that I had to keep moving in that direction. On that Sunday, people joined the church, came forward in prayer, and weeks later, some were still making comments about the sermon. I knew this was a part of my life that I had to move forward with.

Chapter 2 – The Process of Change

Shortly after preaching in Dodge City, I was promoted to manager of the bank I worked for,

which again was a unique thing considering I had only worked there for 6 months, my lack of qualifications and limited banking experience. I quickly caught the attention of several of the upper managers within the corporation and they approached me about managing the largest bank they owned in Kansas. I began preparing to relocate our family at the end of 1998, and I also began to let people know I was available to fill the pulpits of local churches if a pastor was unavailable.

At the end of December, 1998, my family and I relocated to Hutchinson, Kansas where I took over our company's largest bank in the state of Kansas, managing its day to day operations of a facility with over 40 million dollars in assets. Prior to leaving Dodge City, I had also taken my securities licensing exams and was also made the primary investment officer for our region, servicing all of the banks in western Kansas.

Once we arrived in Hutchinson, we quickly got involved in a local church and I began speaking to the pastor about my desire to preach and teach. He put me in contact with Roy Savage, the regional Director of Missions for the Central Baptist Association, and let him know I was available to fill the pulpit when pastors in the area were unavailable.

The pastor of our church had just completed the long process of earning his doctoral degree and found himself in need of a sabbatical. He offered me the opportunity to begin leading our Wednesday night services. In addition, I was added to the preaching roster that filled in during the pastor's absence, and from that I quickly grew familiar with what it was like to preach. The church was a good training

ground and with the attendance running approximately 500 people every Sunday I got very comfortable speaking to large audiences. The more I preached, the more I desired to make preaching a bigger part of my life. While I was working at the bank, I would find my thoughts drifting to the desire to spend my days teaching and preaching scripture and ministering to people. It became my heart's unquenchable passion.

During the next six months, I felt the Lord was telling me to proactively fulfill the pastoral call He put on my life when I was fourteen. Even though for many years I thought the call was forfeited, I quickly understood that it wasn't. God had simply been taking me on a journey of preparation for the things that were ahead of me. The experience I gained as a police officer, for example, would become invaluable the unique ministry and missionary assignments I would undertake in the future. I spoke to my wife about what I was feeling, but found her to be hesitant, as she did not want to be a pastor's wife. Life was comfortable and she knew that entering vocational ministry could require great sacrifice. After about a year; however, she agreed that this was indeed God's plan for us, and the timing was right to enter a vocational ministry role.

In the meantime, I was asked to serve in greater capacities at the church and lead the team for our yearly mission trip. So, it was obvious to us that God was affirming our thoughts and doing something preparatory in our lives. I re-surrendered to the call to enter vocational ministry that I had made when I was 14 and made that decision public before the church. I began to send out resumes to churches across

the United States, looking for a pastoral role. Even though I had no formal theological training or even a college degree for that matter, I knew God was guiding my footsteps. Within a couple of months, I was asked to interview with a church in Dover, Delaware with about three hundred people. It was led by a former Los Angeles police detective who desired to groom a successor. Our common backgrounds made this appear to be a match made in heaven. This ministry would be a full-time vocational position, the thing I wanted. At the same time, I was also contacted by Roy Savage, asking me to fill in for a small church in Hoisington, Kansas. Hoisington was about an hour and a half from where I lived, so I agreed to preach for.

During that trip, the Lord tugged at my heart with an unexpected passion for this small church in Hoisington, even though Dover, Delaware seemed like a much better scenario and was more in line with what I wanted my ministry to be. On my first visit to the church in Hoisington, I noticed it wasn't in very good shape. This was a church that for all intents and purposes should probably have closed their doors long before I ever arrived. In the previous four years, the church had been through four pastors. The average age of the congregation was over seventy, and the attendance had dropped from one-hundred-fifty to about eight each week.

After preaching the first week, I was invited to return week after week. One day the question was posed to me by a member of the pastor search committee (even with 8 people they still had committees), "Would you consider becoming our pastor?" My first answer was "No, I want to be a full-time minister

(the offer was a part time job), and I don't want to continue working at the bank." Almost as quickly as I had answered that question, I felt the Lord saying, "This is where I want you." I prayed about the decision with my wife, and we both agreed that the Lord wanted us there. I turned in my resume' the next Sunday and waited to hear from the search committee in the coming days. In November 1999, all twelve members of the church voted me in unanimously as their pastor at a salary of \$750 per month. The following week, I was ordained at our church in Hutchinson, and I received not only a blessing from the leadership of that church, but also a blessing from the leadership of our former church in Dodge City. My grandfather, my father, and my father-in-law all sat on my ordination council and laid hands on me. My wife and some great friends of ours from Dodge City sang. Many friends from my past, attended to celebrate with me. It was a very special time in my life and a day I will always cherish with great fondness.

I quickly learned that there was another side to my new ministry; however, that side was less than savory. Come to find out the church had a reputation in the community for being divisive and for business meetings that regularly got out of hand. In fact, on at least two occasions, it was necessary for the police were called to restore order in the church business meetings. This was a little indication of what my ministry was going to look like and a valuable lesson that pastor search committees rarely tell you the whole story.

This is what I was referring to when earlier I said my experience as a police officer would come in

handy. I was used to being in a position where it was necessary to resolve conflict, restore order and have the inner strength to stand tough in the face of adversity.

As time went by, we began to see the church grow and began to make some necessary changes. I resigned my managerial position at the bank and moved into the investment division full-time. After about a year we sold our home in Hutchinson and purchased a home in Hoisington as I felt it was important to live in the community. My main growth strategy was simply to get out into the community. We went door to door with fliers, inviting new people into the church – specifically the younger people in the community (after all, the community's average age was about thirty-three years old, and our small church had an average age over seventy). We joined up with some other local pastors and began a monthly teen church, inviting all the Jr High and High School students in the community to join us. It was obvious that very few young families in the community attended church with any regularity and I felt that something had to be done to reverse this trend, but doing so would not be without opposition.

Those who had previously created conflict within the church were not happy that their “kingdoms” were being disrupted and they quickly began to rear their ugly heads, looking for a place to attack. In the years gone by, their solution to their dissatisfaction was to just reduce the pay of the pastor, or they would quit paying the utility bills at the parsonage and literally freeze the man and his family out (Kansas winters can be extremely cold).

Fortunately for me, however, I didn't live in the parsonage and dropping my salary would not hurt much, because my income was based off my professional life at the bank. That said, I still went through the process of it being dropped from \$750 to \$500 per month. As this conflict grew to a climax, I started to move through the steps of reconciliation found in Matthew 18 with the primary antagonists, but they were not willing to enter that process with me. Ultimately, it reached the point where the matter needed to be brought before the church. Realizing that I was not going to back down, these individuals taped a note to my office door the night prior to the church meeting to resolve the conflict, choosing to depart instead of going through the process of reconciliation. Sadly, the husband became deaf and mute within ninety days and passed away within six months. His wife had always been the primary antagonist through the years and she would ultimately live out her days alone.

Once this couple departed, the church flourished dramatically. We grew to forty-five people in a very short period, and most of those people were new converts: people who had never been involved in church previously, and had never had a relationship with Jesus at all. It was an exciting time and truly the embodiment of what I wanted my ministry to be.

I want to share with you a couple of stories that stand out to me from this period. There was a grandmother who lived a couple of doors down from our family that began coming to the church. Georgia often expressed deep concern for the spiritual well-being of her children and grandchildren, asking for regular prayer for God to grab hold of their hearts. One by one, her children came to faith, and

her grandchildren also began to come to faith. Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine that this woman didn't know Jesus herself. Which is why I was so surprised the Sunday she stood up during my sermon, sobbing and screaming, running up to the front, nearly tackling me, and saying "I need Jesus! I need Jesus!" It was a life changing event for both of us. I learned in that moment the importance of not assuming anyone knew Jesus, no matter how faithful they appeared to be on the surface.

The other story is about a single man who hadn't been to church since he was ten years old, nor had he ever read or owned a Bible. Gary started coming to the church after I left a flyer on his door one Saturday morning. Once he figured out the walls were not going to fall down around him, he kept coming back. He was considering a career change into law enforcement, so we had many things in common. I will never forget the day he came up to me and said, "You know that prayer you're always praying at the end of church? I was at home the other night and decided to pray that prayer. Thank you for showing me the way." From that point on, he began helping us with children on Wednesday nights and became a great friend, even encouraging my oldest son to start running (something he still does to this day).

Moments like these are what cemented my love for pastoral ministry. Those moments also showed me the importance of standing for what is right and not making compromises, no matter how intense the opposition might be. Sadly, I find many people in the church today are unwilling to take a stand, resolve a conflict scripturally, or address those who bring disunity into the church openly and

honestly (despite the Apostle Paul being very clear in his letters about what ought to be done in cases like these).

Shortly after arriving in Hoisington, I started to network with the other pastors in town. Our ministerial alliance was comprised of Methodists, Lutherans, Pentecostals, Nazarenes and Baptists. Despite our doctrinal and methodological differences, we developed beautiful relationships. We often had barbecues together, and joint ministries in each other's churches. We started a once-a-month youth service at our facility, and various churches in town helped us with that. I learned what it was like to operate in the Body of Christ, not broken off by denomination, but cross-denominationally joining arms with my brothers and sisters in Christ. This also left a lasting impression on my mind and spirit.

In the spring of 2001 our ministry in Hoisington, Kansas would radically change. On the afternoon of April 21st, 2001, nobody expected what was coming. My Dad had driven up from Wichita to help me work on a car. As he and I were working on the car in my drive way, we observed a thunderstorm building rapidly in the distance. Kansas is tornado alley and tornadoes break out frequently. In my time as a child my dad had been a storm spotter and during my years in law enforcement, I had encountered many tornadoes, so I knew this was always a possibility.

We watched the thunderhead grow until it was a massive forty-thousand-foot high anvil cloud, and we started to pack up before the storm moved in. At seven o'clock my parents decided to leave for Wichita, which was about 2 hours away. About 20 minutes after they left I began hearing weather

reports of 100 mph straight line winds and softball size hail. The storm tracking reports indicated the storm would be getting closer, and that we were in its path. I decided that I needed to send my family into our basement for safety.

Shortly before nine o'clock, I ran upstairs to check the radar on TV. When I got to the living room, I heard a loud sound of something hitting the house, that I believed was probably hail. Because our living room had large picture windows on three sides, I decided to leave the room and ran back to the basement. As I reached the bottom stair, I heard the unmistakable roar of an approaching tornado. When survivors and storm spotters discuss tornadoes, they often describe the sound as being something like the noise of a passing freight train. I can assure you that a freight train pales in comparison. This was the most deafening noise I have ever heard in my life. Not far away, the high school was holding the annual Junior/Senior prom, and the school took a direct hit. Fortunately, all the students were at a Knights of Columbus hall for their celebration. Because the tornado had knocked out the power to the community as it entered town, the tornado sirens never went off.

I ran my family under the basement staircase of our home and pushed them to the floor. My wife was pregnant with our daughter, my middle son was almost four, and my older son, ten. We lay down, listened, and watched. Suddenly, glass began breaking, the pipes underneath the house began to shake violently, the rafters shook, the pressure changed with an ear-popping effect, and continued for some thirty seconds, which seemed to last forever. Our ears were filled with the sounds of things breaking, glass

shattering, wood splintering and a roaring wind unlike anything I had ever heard before or since. Debris was hitting whatever was left of our house, if anything at all. My ears popped a second time and after a very long forty-five seconds, it was over.

Soon afterward, we all learned that our community had been hit by a 3/8-mile-wide tornado that was rated F4 on the Fujita scale. The top wind speeds were measured around 260 mph. It had traveled nearly five miles and the ground and destroyed a third of our community. But here's what I marvel at: even though a third of the town was hit, only one man died because he had foolishly decided to stay on his porch watch the tornado. All the kids from the high school were safe, despite having no warning or understanding of what was going on. Six blocks around our house, there was complete devastation. My house ended up being the only house in that six-block radius that didn't have to be bulldozed. It was one of the most miraculous things I've ever witnessed. In the weeks that followed many accounts of God's miraculous presence in the storm were told throughout the community. You can read many of these stories in my previous book "Lessons from The Storm."

Because of the tornado, the churches in our area came together and became very much the embodiment of what the early church was like. There was more unity among churches than there had ever been, and everyone took an active role in some way. Our church set up an emergency portable daycare center, other churches became feeding centers, while other churches distributed water and clothing. All of us worked together to rebuild the community, and this season of unity lasted about a

year. The night of the storm, we were invited to stay in the Lutheran parsonage with the pastor and her husband. With agreement from her congregation we ended up living there for nearly five months while our house was being repaired, because the devastation had made our house uninhabitable. A few weeks before our daughter was born, we were finally able to move back into our house which had amazingly held together and been deemed repairable by a structural engineer. The contractors ended up completely gutting and renovating our house, leaving us with a seemingly brand new house.

In the meantime, my wife and I took a vacation to my favorite place of retreat, Ouray, Colorado. During our time away, we made the decision to leave the bank and open an independent investment advisory practice of our own with the left over insurance money from the tornado. My office was located on the town square in Great Bend, Kansas, where I shared the suite with a client and fellow Christian man who had become a great friend. I opened the office in mid-June of 2001 and almost immediately was faced with the challenges of guiding clients through a post 9/11 world. I discovered a great sense of fulfillment working for myself and quickly understood that the new-found freedom with my time was my greatest personal and ministry asset. This became very apparent as we welcomed our third child, a precious baby girl into the world on October 11th of 2001.

Prior to the tornado, I had begun to develop a close friendship with a Foursquare pastor named Daniel. Daniel became not only a good friend, but one of my first mentors in the ministry. He was nearly twice my age, and taught me much about the Holy Spirit, spiritual gifts, and things that, as a Southern

Baptist boy, I had never had much teaching on, much less any exposure to. Daniel had a great love for riding his motorcycle and an even greater love for Scripture and prayer. He found himself frustrated that through his ministry in Hoisington his church had never grown much beyond twenty people. At the same time, he ran a soup kitchen in the nearby city of Great Bend, where he had the privilege of seeing hundreds of people surrender their lives to Jesus. I often reminded him that he truly had a very fruitful ministry, it just didn't look like he thought it would.

That next spring, I felt the Lord saying to me that my time in Hoisington was done. My wife and I decided to fast together for a week, something we had never done. During the fast, she felt the Lord had also revealed to her that our time in Hoisington was done. As we began asking the Lord "What shall we do next?" I felt led to go to my computer late one night and write a one paragraph description of myself online. This was simply a step of faith to say I was available for whatever God had for me next.

In the spring of 2002, I had finally graduated from seminary with a Bachelor's degree in Theology and was starting on my Master's degree in Theology. I had also written and self-published my first book, "Troubles of A Righteous Man", so here is essentially what I wrote in that online paragraph:

"My name is Carl Willis. I am a bi-vocational pastor. I have a Bachelor's degree in theology. I've also written a book. If you'd like to know more about me, contact me." I put it out on the internet, essentially raising my hand and saying, "Here I am, send me." A few weeks later, I got a call from a church in Pennsylvania. I had seen their advertisement online and I knew it was going to be a difficult place. It

wasn't a place I wanted to go to, in fact, the description said something along the lines of "our previous pastor had some personal problems and we're now looking for a new one." I was smart enough to know what that meant: either the pastor had been involved in a moral failure or he had split the church. Anyway, the search committee called me and as we talked on the phone, deep in my spirit I knew that this was the place where God wanted to send me.

I called my wife to ask her what she thought, and she said, "I think we're moving to Pennsylvania." She later told me that she immediately knew in her spirit that God was moving us there. One of the primary concerns I had with moving was that I had grown my business to a successful six figure a year business, and even though I could take my business with me, the prospect of moving was still a little daunting. Most of my clients seemed committed to stay with me, even from such a great distance, although a few expressed their reservations. I had money enough in the bank to get the business started again once I got to Pennsylvania, and in fact had my best month ever in June of 2002, making \$36,000 that month. After evaluating our present circumstances, we both felt that we were in a good position to make this type of a move.

We agreed to fly up to Pennsylvania with our oldest son for a few days to interview and get acquainted with the church and local area. We also learned the story of the church's current dilemma. The prior pastor had been asked to resign when he disclosed an inappropriate relationship with a woman in the congregation. The pastor had refused to leave, and so, the rest of the leadership made the decision

to leave instead. Three months before I was contacted, that pastor finally gave in to the increasing pressure and resigned. I would later learn that the founding pastor had left 5 years earlier, because of a moral failure as well (Another reminder that search committees don't tell you everything). While we were in Pennsylvania, we spent the better part of a week with the search committee leaders. We found out that their previous pastor was a hometown boy and most of the church was comprised of his friends and family, who didn't want anyone else as their pastor.

When the night came for the church to vote on whether to call me, I was met with less than open arms. One member of the search committee even telling me, "You're too perfect" and questioning whether as a financial advisor I made my living "ripping people off." These statements would be a foreshadowing of things to come with her family. We stayed in the back of the church for about two and a half hours, and finally the head of the search committee approached us saying, "Listen, they're fighting over whether you should come. The former pastor's wife showed up and said he's doing better and that he might want to come back." He went on to tell me, "If you've got something else lined up, go ahead and take it, I don't think we're going to be able to make a decision."

I told this man, "I don't care how long it takes for you guys to figure it out, I just know God is going to send us here. And so, once you figure that out for yourselves, we'll still be here, and I look forward to your call." So, we flew back to Kansas, began our preparations for moving and a week later got the call. The church had decided to call me as their pastor, so we packed up three weeks later and moved

to Aliquippa, Pennsylvania.

Chapter 3 – A Stranger in a Strange Land

On my first Sunday, there were ninety-five people at the church and there was a buzz in the air.

The former pastor's wife was in attendance as were his parents. During the service, there were several people got up and gave glowing speeches about the former pastor and his wife; while at the same time giving a less than warm welcome to us. As the service ended, the two remaining deacons approached me. The first one, who was also the music leader, said, "This will be my last Sunday here." The other one said, "I'll stick with you for six months, but I'm out of here, too." One had been the former pastor's college roommate and the other was the uncle to the former pastor's wife. So, that was my welcome to Southwest Pennsylvania.

The following week, the attendance had dropped to just thirty people. I laughingly told friends back in Kansas that I managed to grow the church from ninety-five to thirty people in a week's time – an amazing accomplishment for sure.

Another thing I had to face in Pennsylvania was culture shock. I had to learn to minister cross culturally, engaging people with very different backgrounds, people who were simply not like me. In Pittsburgh, ethnic pride is very big. For example, instead of simply having Catholics, you have the Russian Catholics, Italian Catholics, Irish Catholics and the Lithuanian Catholics. The same goes for Irish pride, Italian pride, and so on.

Southwest Pennsylvania is a unique place. Most the people I encountered had always lived there. It was not uncommon for the grandparents, parents and grown children to all live near one another. Even though places like New York City and Washington, DC were only 6 hours away, most had never even traveled to those cities. Two things were always on the mind of the locals, Pittsburgh Steelers football and deer hunting season. To prove my point, I had elderly women in my church who would paint their fingernails black and gold on Steelers game days and the local schools always closed on the first day of deer season. It was not long before I was drawn in to these two mainstays of life.

I was fortunate that the week following my arrival we also had a new Director of Missions move to Pittsburgh. Lamar Duke had spent much of his ministry turning around troubled churches in the South. He had gone on to plant a successful church in Georgia. He was now in Pittsburgh to focus on church planting and church strengthening. Lamar and I would quickly develop a very close friendship, that later turned into a formal mentoring relationship that lasted for over 5 years. I very clearly remember Lamar making this statement to me one day: “Before God uses a man, He often crushes him first....”

Over the years, I have seen this preparation process play out many times. As you will see in the coming chapters, this would also be true of me.

The church had hired me part-time as their pastor and the remainder of my support was supposed to come from my business. Unfortunately, as we were leaving Kansas, I had a client get cold feet about our move and cancel a very large contract that I had already received payment on. This immediately put my over \$20,000 in the hole and took all the funds that I had earmarked for the relocation of my business. I was unable to overcome this deficit in a timely manner and we found ourselves out of money. Carol had to go back to work to help us pay the bills and I had to go to the church and ask them to take a huge step of faith. I laid our monthly household expenses before the church and asked if they would consider making that my salary and transitioning my position from part-time to full-time. After much prayer and consideration, the church agreed to make this transition.

It didn't take long to determine that there were still some antagonists in my midst. With the departure of all the previous leadership, I quickly set out recommending two men in the church to fill the role of deacons and assist me in serving the congregation. The husband of the woman on the search committee who had expressed the earlier concern that because I was a financial advisor I would rip people off, was not a happy camper. He showed up on a Wednesday evening, walked into the middle of a Bible study I was leading and demanded that I speak with him in my office. He turned red and began to yell and scream that I had no right to recommend these men to the church. He began to push into my

personal space and began to clench his fists. The police officer in me reared up and I gave him a choice of backing away or physically removing him from my presence. Fortunately, he backed down. This would not be our only altercation. I would soon learn that he was a big “union” supporter and had a deep-seated mistrust of all leadership. He viewed my role as pastor no differently than he viewed the management of the power plant where he worked. In his mind, leaders were always out to screw the little guy over.

One of the first things I did in this new church was undertake the revision of the church by-laws and operating procedures. The church by-laws and constitution were ineffective, since they had been written for a church that held different doctrinal beliefs and was three times their size. When I proposed this change to the congregation, the man who wanted to punch me earlier became highly agitated. When we put this matter before the church, he continued to challenge me and make personal attacks in front of the congregation. Later, when it came time to vote on the proposed revision, he became extremely disruptive, upsetting many of the people present. In response, I did something my leaders found quite shocking. I turned to this man and said, "You seem to have a real problem with the way I am doing things, so I am giving you time to write your own constitution and by-laws which you can then present to the church for review within thirty days." At this point, he started to back pedal and make excuses, and I said to him, "If you have so much concern that you need to make this much noise over the issue, we can afford to take the time for you to give us something productive to resolve the conflict." After the meeting, one of my leaders confronted me and questioned why I would give this man such a platform. I

told my leader that I needed to draw him out so everyone could see his heart. I assured him that thirty days later, this man would have nothing to present.

Thirty days came around and I asked the man to present all his concerns and recommended revisions to the new constitution and by-laws. He began to stutter and stammer, unable to give a single concrete example or recommendation. Immediately, one of my deacons made a motion to call for a vote on the proposed constitution and by-laws I had presented thirty days earlier. A vote was taken unanimously in favor of the recommendation, with the only dissenting votes being this man, his wife and teenage son. This man and his family ended up leaving the church within the next few weeks because his pride was hurt. Although he thought he was fighting against leaders having too much control, he was ultimately exposed trying to exercise too much control against the best interest of the church.

About a year after this incident, I had another former leader show up to the church. This man had left the church during the moral failure turmoil of the previous pastor. He had walked away from his leadership position and was now wanting to come back into his previous church leadership role. He bypassed our new member's class and was not willing to go through any of the membership procedures that we put into place. When we adopted our new by-laws, I took all the existing membership through this process so that everyone had the same foundation and understanding of our mission. I was unwilling to compromise on this principle for him because we as a church body had agreed that this would be our process. When he didn't get the answer he wanted from me, he began to plead his case to the more

influential members of the congregation. I again restated my position and refused to compromise. At this point, he began to spread rumors that I was hooked on pornography and possibly having an affair. He even convinced my leadership team that they needed to take a congregational survey to prove that I was an ineffective leader. This was very painful to me, watching my leaders cower under pressure and not stepping up to defend me. Thus, I forced the issue and initiated the steps of reconciliation and church discipline with him. I scheduled a meeting with him at a local restaurant and informed him that my leadership team would be with me. I informed him that I would speak to him both as a brother in Christ and as the pastor of the church. When the day came for this meeting to take place, he no-showed on us; choosing instead to leave a message on one of their answering machines saying he wouldn't be at that meeting and we never saw him again. As I saw in Hoisington and have continued to see in my ministry, those who create the greatest conflicts in the church fear the exposure of truth and will generally turn and run when they risk being exposed.

Here's the thing that stood out to me. In both churches that I had pastored – in Hoisington and in Pittsburgh – there were underlying problems and reoccurring spiritual strongholds that nobody ever dealt with. As you looked over the history of these churches, the same problems emerged repeatedly even though the names and faces would change.

The more I have worked with other churches and pastors over the years, the more I realize that the generational sins of a congregation can be one of the most damaging things to the health and ministry

of the church. Ultimately, these churches have no effectiveness for the Kingdom of God and many see their ministries come to an end as a cautionary tale.

Through these experiences, the Lord has made me aware of spiritual patterns that take place in a local church and how important it is to deal with these patterns if there is ever a hope of that church becoming healthy again.

The other thing that became quite apparent to me was that churches would immediately spring to life and become healthy again once they started to deal with the issues and refocus on the true work of bringing the good news of Jesus Christ to a lost and dying world. Leaders within our denomination quickly began to recognize the strong gift of discernment that God has given me. As a result, I was asked to develop the church planter assessment process for the Pennsylvania/New Jersey Southern Baptist convention and I started working with church planters throughout Western Pennsylvania. I assessed prospective candidates and their spouses for their suitability for church planting and funding. It gave me great insight into church planting, how it works, and how church planters think. Throughout this process, I developed a great passion for pioneering new work and helping others pioneer new work.

The other thing that came about was that God sent us up and coming leaders, and so within a matter of months I had two campus ministers who were leading collegiate ministries. I had a young man who wanted to go to seminary and had a gift for musical ministry. I had others who were exploring the unique call that God had on their lives. Once again, I found myself equipping and releasing new leaders,

something that continues to be one of my greatest sources of fulfillment. At the same time, I began mentoring a Presbyterian pastor who lived next door to the church.

These things began to happen simultaneously and the church started to grow once again. It was during this season that the Lord made me face one of my deepest fears. In 2003, my wife and I were expecting our fourth child. We were so excited, but the pregnancy proved to be extremely difficult. My wife had been sick in ways she never had been during her pregnancies with our other children. One day, when I was out of town, she had gotten so sick that she couldn't clean up her own vomit. Several of the ladies from the church had to come over and clean up her vomit because she was so weak.

We went for a sonogram in the spring of 2003 and were thrilled to watch our baby's movements and heart beating on the screen in front of us. A few days later, we learned that there might be a problem with our baby. They had seen a possible membrane in the sonogram, which could signify that the baby would have Down's Syndrome. We went back in for a second sonogram. As we watched the monitor, there was no longer movement or the beating of a heart. The turned to us and said: "I am so sorry Mr. and Mrs. Willis; you've lost your baby." I will never forget looking at that sonogram screen and seeing that motionless figure of a child, knowing that I would never meet with her until the other side of this life. We had planned to call her Kirsten.

After the D & C, we learned that she had had a genetic birth defect known as Turner's Syndrome and was missing a sex chromosome from her body. This would have likely caused her to have many

other serious health issues and a very difficult life had she been born. Despite our pain, we took comfort in the fact that God had spared her from the difficulty of this life. We knew she was better off with Jesus than she ever would have been with us. It was in this desolate place that I learned that at times the Lord chooses to bring about healing in a way that we may not like. To leave this life and enter the awaiting arms of Jesus is truly the ultimate healing.

I wrote a letter to Kirsten that day, and I still have it on my computer. Every now and then I look at it. I take comfort in the truth that one day I will lay eyes on my daughter. What a glorious day that will be! I will never forget the feeling of helplessness that I had, knowing that there was nothing I could do or say that would heal my wife's pain. It was the one time that my wife needed me to be her husband and not her pastor.

A few months later, the pastor of the Presbyterian Church next door to ours and his wife lost their unborn child as well. Even in my own pain, I could minister to him, because I had just walked through those darkest days. Over the coming months, I watched my wife go through some very dark days of depression that I had never seen her go through before. Regular appointments with a Christian counselor and anti-depressant medication were the only things that kept her from shutting down completely. Deep inside she felt responsible for the death of our daughter. All I could do was watch, listen and love her. There was nothing I could say that would make it better. There was nothing I could do that would change what had happened. The Lord showed me that sometimes He allows us to be in positions where

we have no recourse and all we can do is trust Him.

Despite it all, we continued to watch the church grow and flourish. We began taking mission trips each year with groups of fifteen to twenty people. The trips included Plainville, Kansas; Detroit, Michigan and Buffalo, New York. I watched a leader who had initially told me “I don’t pray and I don’t read the Bible out loud” become a great leader within the church, who prayed and read scripture aloud.

Some of my greatest experiences in ministry came during our time in Pennsylvania. I even remember asking the Lord if He would allow me to stay in Pennsylvania. I loved our home, our community, the church and the people; however, I soon knew that we would not be staying. As we entered the spring of 2006, I started to feel a deep restlessness within my soul.

Since I had time to study and prepare my messages, I felt that one of the ways I could be a blessing to other pastors was by uploading and sharing my sermon notes at sermoncentral.com. In early spring of 2006, I received an email from Pastor Paul Jesudoss in Madurai, India. I had never heard of him (or Madurai for that matter), but he said: "I preached your message “Faithful and Fruitful” to my church of over 1000 Hindu converts, and I just wanted you to know what happened when I preached it. He went on to tell me the story of what God had done in his church. He then made two requests – one for Bibles, and one for me to come to preach and teach in India. If I were to list all the places on earth I didn't want to visit, India was certainly on the top of that list, followed a close second by most of Africa. I wrote back to him and said, “Thank you for your kind words and your invitation. Unfortunately, I don't feel that the

Lord is leading me to India at this point. I will be praying for you, and I will try to get you some Bibles.”

I was at least stirred to help him with the purchase of Bibles, so we put together some funds and sent Bibles to Pastor Jesudoss. He sent me pictures of the service where these Bibles were distributed and I was satisfied that I had done my part. Amazingly, within two weeks five other pastors from India invited me to preach in their churches and teach in their cities and villages. I realized that maybe God was trying to show me something, and so I said, “Lord, if You want me to go, I’ll go.” I had said “yes” once again. I emailed Pastor Jesudoss and said, “I believe the Lord is showing me that I need to come to India. I don’t know how I’m going to get there – I don’t have the money – but let’s pray, and let’s pick a date, and we’ll just trust that the Lord brings me there.” So, we picked a date – September 2006 – and prayed about the provisions and all that needed to happen to make this trip a reality. When I approached my church leaders, the only thing they wanted to know is if they had to pay anything for it, and I said no. At the same time, I realized that we were now moving in different directions and my time there was quickly ending. As an added confirmation of this trip, I was introduced to the pastor of the Tamil Church of Pittsburgh. Tamil is the language of the state of Tamil-Nadu, India in which the city of Madurai is located. The Tamil Church invited me to come and spend time with them in preparation, which I was very grateful for.

We had been blessed to have a family join us from a large apartment complex in a nearby community. We had done sports camps and block parties there with great response. I felt we had the

opportunity to plant a second church out of our church, and when I put the plan before our church leaders, they just weren't supportive. It was affirmed in my spirit once again that we were moving in different directions.

What I began to understand was that after the church had been nurtured back to health, my gift mix was not the best fit for the congregation. They didn't need me to resolve their crisis anymore and I am not the best fit for the long-term shepherding, and that's ok. I realized that my role in the Kingdom was to break hard ground, put things back in order, move things quickly, and then turn things over to somebody else who was better gifted to maintain and nurture. I got very serious about mentoring the pastor who lived next door to the church, and although he was a Presbyterian pastor, he had not finished seminary yet, so he was unable to be ordained in the Presbyterian system. I told him what I believed God was doing with me and how my heart was stirred, and asked him to pray about whether God might be calling him to serve as the next pastor of the church.

I also met with my church leaders in June, and I told them, "Listen, I know God is leading me somewhere else and it's time for you to have new leadership. I don't know where I'm going, but here's the deal – come December 31st, if I don't have another pastorate to go to, I will simply step down so you can move forward. I will continue to serve you until that point." They received that with a bit of reservation and since we were talking about making changes, they also said that they needed to replace the roof on the church, and that they needed me to take a pay cut. Well, taking a pay cut hadn't been in

party of my plan, but I agreed and was still grateful that they had taken such a big step of faith, taking me full-time. I asked them to hold off on the pay cut at least until I had come back from India, which they agreed to do.

I had made a promise to my oldest son, who was a junior in high school, that if I didn't have a pastorate by the end of the semester, I would get out of the ministry until he graduated high school. If I found something before that, we'd go ahead and move. So, the clock was ticking. My do or die date was early December, 2006.

Over the summer, I had slowly begun to receive donations for my India trip and could move forward with my plan to travel there. The night before I left a friend of mine called me to wish me well and to make sure I was confident that I would be safe, since I had never met Pastor Jesudoss or been to India. I assured him I would be fine and finished my preparations. About an hour later, I spoke to Pastor Jesudoss for the first time by phone and finalized our initial meeting in Madurai.

The next day I boarded a plane for my first transatlantic flight, stopping in Germany for a few hours before proceeding to Chennai, India. I arrived in Chennai around 1AM and found out that I would have to wait in a waiting area at the domestic terminal and would not be able to check in for my morning flight until around 7AM. The terminal was hot and humid, so my attempts at sleep were short lived, even though my head was constantly jerking from jet lag naps. Other than a military officer, I was the only person in the terminal until around 5:30AM.

Around 8AM, I boarded a turbo-prop airplane for the short one hour flight to Madurai. I was humored that even on such a short flight they were serving a full meal, lemon water and some type of curry dish. The lemon water was a welcomed refreshment. The main course on the other hand did not appeal to my jet lagged stomach.

When I landed at the Madurai airport, the terminal was a small building like the airport terminals in places like Dodge City, Kansas. I was surprised to learn that I had just landed in a city of nearly 3 million people. Pastor Jesudoss met me with his driver Jayraj and we departed for his home. One of my requests had been that I not stay anywhere other than in his home because I believed relationships were best developed in the home.

When we arrived at Pastor Jesudoss' home, I was greeted by Pastor Jesudoss' wife Flora and his four daughters: Elishba, Betsy, Phoebe and Joy. The family welcomed me with open arms and made me feel at home. Upon entering their home, I was presently surprised at how spacious and modern it was. The home had western style toilets (my biggest fear had been over the types of toilet facilities that I might have to use), room air conditioning and a shower. Pastor Jesudoss informed me that I would be speaking at a Youth Meeting in about two hours, so I freshened up and changed clothes. After speaking to the youth, I returned to Pastor Jesudoss' home and within an hour or so was overtaken by jet lag for the next 10 or so hours.

Over the next 3 weeks, I spoke in open air crusades and churches in Madurai, Sivakasi, Chennai

and Trichy. In Trichy, I met Flora's father, Jacob. I found Jacob to be an inspiring figure. He had been imprisoned in his younger life for making bombs and also for his affiliation with the communist party. At some point thereafter he had an encounter with Jesus that would forever change his life. By the time I met Jacob, he had planted over 400 churches and at least 2 Bible colleges throughout India. Even more impressive was the legacy of his family. Both of his daughters had married pastors, his son was also a pastor and all his grandchildren were active in ministry. It was also in Trichy that I taught Elishba, Pastor Jesudoss' oldest daughter, to cook. Being the oldest it was important to the family that she marry in the near future and a lack of cooking skills was a hindrance to that process.

I was also inspired by Pastor Jesudoss' story and family. In the mid 1970's Paul was an engineer working in a power plant. He became despondent and decided he would end his life by throwing himself into a large tank of boiling water. As he prepared to jump, he felt a hand on his shoulder stopping him and he heard a voice speaking his name. When he turned around, he saw no one else there, but he knew he had just had an encounter with Jesus. It was from this place that he surrendered his life to the preaching of the gospel and knew that he was to go to Madurai. In 1979 he arrived in Madurai and founded Church of Jesus and the home for Forsaken Babies. I would also learn that each of his brothers, except for a disabled brother, were also pastors as were the husbands of his sisters. As with Flora's family, all of Paul's children were involved in ministry.

One of the things I had asked the Lord as I began the search for my next ministry was was if I

could stay in the northeast, because I saw such a need for Jesus there. I had also asked the Lord to help me break free of denominational life as a Southern Baptist and become a non-denominational pastor so that I could work more cooperatively with others. While I was in India, I was contacted by a Southern Baptist church in Corpus Christi, Texas. Now, you can't get any more "south" than Corpus Christi, and in Texas, Southern Baptists argue over what kind of Southern Baptist they are! There are three different versions of Southern Baptists that operate in the state. It was the opposite of the culture I wanted to get into. I called my wife from India and we both agreed that God had placed this church in our path and I needed to respond to their email. A few days later, I returned to the U.S., inspired, unsure, but eager to see what God had in store for the journey ahead.

The church in Corpus Christi was a very formal church – you know – pipe organs, suits and ties. I'm not a pipe organ, suit and tie kind of guy. I preach in Hawaiian shirts! At the same time, I was also approached by a church in Bolivar, Missouri that wanted me to take on a movie theater ministry as an associate pastor. Carol and I talked extensively with both churches, finding out as much as we could about them before making our decision. We learned that the church in Corpus Christi was in deep trouble. They had originally run 1200 people every Sunday, but were now down to 120 people each week. They church had a fifteen-acre campus with seven buildings, and an extremely large budget that they were trying to maintain with so few people. One of the questions they asked me was "We've got a lot of problems – why would you want to come to a place like this?" I remember laughingly telling them I really wouldn't, but that that was my job. This was what God had equipped me to do – to come into

difficult places and nurture them back to health.

There was also a church in my home town, Wichita, Kansas, that contacted me. They had gone through a very nasty split and they were interested in having me interview as a pastoral candidate. The prospect of moving back to my home town, which was close to my parents, excited me. It's something I wanted to do, seeing as they were getting older. We talked with all three of the search committees, and when the time came, we decided to fly to Corpus Christi and interview with the church there. The other churches were not going to be making a decision until early spring and would not be able to meet our time frame.

We fell in love with the Corpus Christi and saw the church's potential. The fact that it was on the coast and much warmer than Pennsylvania didn't hurt either. The church was located in the middle of the city, and people weren't starting new churches in that part of the city, so we saw a lot of opportunity. The search committee asked me to return for a vote by the congregation. I said, "Listen, I'm going to be unemployed December 31st. If you don't mind, I'm going to go ahead and step out in faith and load a moving truck, because I know this is where God wants me to be. When the congregation approves me, if you don't mind, I'd like to start the next day." They agreed to that, and we flew back to Pennsylvania, ready to begin a new chapter and put our home up for sale.

Chapter 4 – Spiritual War Zone

We arrived on January 7th (our 17th wedding anniversary). The church voted to hire me, with only two people voting against us, and so our new ministry began. My first day on the job, I got a call from a pastor of one of the other Baptist churches. His name was Bubba Stahl. We went to lunch together, and he said, "Carl, let me tell you something about Corpus Christi: the people here love their churches, but they hate their pastors." That was an interesting welcome to town! But in many ways those words proved to be very true.

My first three months there were a honeymoon. Everybody loved me. I had decided to wear a suit and tie just to fit in, and I didn't change anything in the first ninety days. They loved my preaching, my interaction with the people and my operational skills. Around the four-month mark, something happened that brought the honeymoon to a screeching halt. Corpus Christi's demographics had changed, and over the years it had become 64% Hispanic in population. In fact, Caucasian was the minority. The church, however, was 95% Caucasian and did not match its community at all. I was approached by a Hispanic house church group who were interested in having an English service that would reach out to second and third generation English speaking Hispanics. The reason for their request was because the younger generation Hispanics were not finding a home in the Hispanic or Anglo churches. There was a void there and that's the role this group wanted to fill. They asked if it would be possible to begin

holding a Sunday night service on our campus.

I suggested that they take over the Sunday night services at our church and we would combine with them during that hour each week. That became an extremely unpopular decision very quickly amongst my church members. I had put it before my deacons and they were all for it, but those who had caused trouble over the years were not happy. The undercurrent of backlash became so severe that it was recommended that I utilize one of their favorite tools...the town-hall meeting. At my first town-hall meeting, I had men in their eighties accusing me of violating church laws and bylaws and doing all sorts of heinous, terrible, horrible things. I met these men head on and called their bluff. I told them that if they were going to make accusations, they needed to prove them. They had never been challenged like that before, so they got up and they left. They came to me personally in my office a few days later and tried to start the same thing and I just held them accountable. These men had a viciousness to them, unlike anything I had ever seen. On Sundays, as I would walk through the halls, I would hear things like "Carl is turning the church over to the Mexicans," and other things that had no place in the church. Ultimately, the church voted in favor of my recommendation and we agreed to begin doing our Sunday evening service with this Hispanic house church group.

During the summer, the attacks from my antagonists got more intense and I ended up asking a local prayer intercessory group if they would walk through the church campus with me and pray. I said, "I'm getting blindsided by all this and I'm not sure what's behind it. Would you help me identify anything

spiritual that might be here? Would you listen to what the Lord is saying to you as you walk through?"

We took a Saturday afternoon and walked the entire campus. Interestingly enough, as the prayer team arrived and reached for the door handle, an audible voice said to them "What are you doing here?" As we walked through the church, we came to the Sanctuary, and the Lord said to one of the intercessors, "The altar has been desecrated." As we went through other parts of the church there were words of grieving the Holy Spirit, deep sin and deep rooted things that had no business in the church. When we got to the end I asked the team to pray and ask the Lord to show us the root of the problem. One of the intercessors began to weep very loudly and the team leader asked her why. She said "The Lord is giving me names and I'm afraid, I don't want to say those names, what if I'm wrong?" What was interesting was that this prayer team had never been to our church before. The woman gave me three names. The first was of the man who had been so vicious and who had challenged me in the town-hall meeting. That was really the Lord confirming for me what He'd already shown me. It was just another affirmation. In that moment, I realized that I was missing something in my own walk with the Lord – I realized that I could listen at a much deeper level than I had before. I made it a point after that to spend quiet time in prayer just sitting and listening and I recorded notes of what the Lord was saying to me.

As we moved on through the end of 2007 and into 2008, the church had not had a music minister for several years, even though they had allotted for one in their budget. After departure of a staff member, we had enough space in our budget to finally bring in a music minister. The search, led me to a man who had taught jazz studies at a university, performed jazz in the music halls of New York City, and was

a composer. His wife was an aspiring musician, and we all hit it off well. After a few months of searching and praying, he agreed to be our music minister. The church was thrilled to have a music minister after so many years, but unfortunately, within the first few days on staff, his honeymoon came to an end, as I had benched the organist and the pianist (husband and wife), because they refused to play if they weren't getting paid for it. I wanted our musicians to give from the overflow of their heart without promise of compensation. From that point on things got interesting.

There came a day that I was under great attack again from our long-standing group of pastoral antagonists. I called a group of local pastors together – pastors who I had become very close with. We met in my study behind the Sanctuary and prayed together. Each man told me: “What's happening with you isn't about this church – it's about you.” I wasn't sure what to think about that.

Within a few weeks, an intercessor came to the church and took up the task of regular intercession for me. She'd come out of a Lutheran background, and had never been to a Baptist church before. She said, “I was praying the other day and the Lord told me I needed to come here and pray for you every day.” I was humbled by that. Shortly after that relationship began, she made this statement to me: “As I was praying for you, Carl, the Lord told me He is making you unbreakable.” Now, unbreakable is not a word you really want to hear, because it means there are tough times ahead.

In January of 2008, I was meeting with close group of local pastors, when the senior statesman of the group, Warren Piersol, who was in his late eighties, told a story about his ministry back in the early

seventies. He had been a prominent Assembly of God minister in the USA, during that time. He shared about a time that he was at a conference and he remembered a couple singing a song: "Lord be the Lord of every Kingdom of my heart." As he sang that song, the Holy Spirit asked him, "Am I the Lord of every kingdom of your heart?" He told God all the things that were in his heart – look at my ministry and the things I'm doing in Your name... but the question didn't go away. Warren said that from that point he went on a journey that radically changed the way he operated. He was no longer bound by denominations and traditions. The Lord really controlled every thought, every action, and everything that was going on in his life. I was touched by that story.

Driving back to my office, I found myself facing the same question. I knew God wasn't asking the question because He didn't know, but because He wanted me to see something. I remember saying "Lord, I want you to be the Lord of every kingdom of my heart, but the fact that You are asking means that You are probably not." When I got to my office I said: "Lord I want You to be the Lord of every kingdom of my heart, and whatever that means, I simply say 'Yes.'" That began an intense journey of refinement for me. During the first few months of that journey, the Lord would point various things out to me daily. I would get aggravated with another driver or irritated with something, and the Lord would simply point to that area and say, "You see that? That's not under My authority. Will you give that to Me? Can I be the Lord of that kingdom of Your life?"

Around that time, I received a letter in the mail from a local man who the Lord had awakened

with a vision of difficult times coming for the city of Corpus Christi. He had instructed this man to contact all the pastors and call them to pray. I found myself meeting this man in an empty garage, where every night he would pray for three or four hours for the deliverance of the city. The Lord instructed me to go and pray with him. I was the only pastor that ever came to pray with him. As we prayed, the Lord told me that there were spiritually critical things taking place in the world and in our city... He told me that He needed all of me: all of my heart, all of my life, all of my passion, and all of my commitment, so that He could complete His good and perfect will in me and through me.

In March of that year, I had the opportunity to go to India again with two deacons from the church. Shortly before I left, the Lord came to me with a second question: "Will you be an apostle in My kingdom?" Well, there were a couple of problems I had with that: First of all, I was Southern Baptist and we didn't acknowledge the operation of apostles or prophets in today's world. We struggled at times with acknowledging the spiritual gifts. I found myself wrestling with God over that question, due to the fact that I didn't speak in tongues, and the apostle Paul talked a lot about speaking in tongues. I also wrestled with God about the fact that people were not getting healed when I laid my hands on them. I also didn't know if I'd been baptized in the Holy Spirit as many of my Pentecostal friends understood it. If that wasn't enough, I also knew from Scripture, it didn't end well for the apostles. The call on their lives was costly, lonely, and they suffered greatly. I wasn't sure I could do that.

God had originally asked: "Am I the Lord of every kingdom of your heart?" Now I found the

question was changing. I felt God saying to me, “Carl, have given Me everything you're willingly going to give Me, but there are things in your life that don't belong, things that you're not willing to give Me, things that you don't even realize are there, things that need to be under My control. Do you give Me permission to take those things even by force and to knock them down in your life?” I told Him yes.

Over the next few weeks, the Lord began to systematically take control of different areas of my life, different kingdoms I didn't even know were there – things like my self-image, what people thought of me, and how I perceived myself.

While I was in India, the question about the call of an apostle didn't go away. I saw some interesting things happen on that trip. Once, as I was sitting in a prayer service, I decided to do some Bible study and prepare to preach. People around me were praying and worshiping in the local language, Tamil, which I didn't understand. I noticed that every time the congregation said, "Praise the Lord," in Tamil, my spirit was saying the same thing. It was fascinating because I wasn't even listening in, and yet I knew what they were saying. I preached that day and spent time praying with people. A lot of people needed prayer for healing. One man came to me for prayer and I found these words coming out of my mouth: “In the name of Jesus, I command you to be healed!” I shuddered at what was about to come out, but I felt the Lord chastising me for my lack of faith. I found myself caught between my long-held understandings and a new journey of faith. My heart was once again stirred deeply for international ministry. I had already fallen in love with the people of India in 2006, and I was thrilled to be back. The

Lord was stretching me greatly.

At the end of the trip, as I was heading back to the airport with Pastor Jesudoss, I asked him: “What do you want to accomplish in life?” He told me that he wanted to plant a thousand churches before his life was over. In my spirit, I very clearly heard the Lord tell me that I would never see the harvest in India, but that Pastor Jesudoss would. He also told me to understand that the work I had done would be in preparation of the harvest. I remember asking the Lord, “Can I at least look in the rear view mirror every now and then, just to see what's happening behind me?” I didn't think a lot more about that request after that.

Back home, I continued with my work. Things became more challenging at the church, and I began to face more and more resistance as the church was beginning to grow again. We were running about 250 people every Sunday, almost double from where I began. Looking at the church history, I learned there had been two lawsuits against the church due to child molestation issues. The church had lost both of those lawsuits and I realized that most of the spiritual problems we were facing were part of the same root that had created these acts. Those incidents and multiple moral failures by church leaders are what had desecrated the altar.

I found that many of the challenges were in the area of worship. The choir had controlled much of the direction of the church and used music as a weapon. As I mentioned previously, the organist refused to play on Sunday mornings if we didn't pay him. His wife was the pianist and they wouldn't play

for the love of Jesus or because they wanted to, they would only play if we paid them. So, I invited them to step aside, which was not a popular move.

The church choir, for 52 years, had done a Good Friday musical called Seven Last Words – a musical that was in Latin, I might add. I remember sitting through it and thinking it was just a performance. They were not performing to share the message of Christ. They were performing only for the sake of performing. My first year I was so disturbed by what I had seen, I stopped Seven Last Words for good – also a very unpopular move. In 2008, for Good Friday, I showed the ***Passion of the Christ*** and we observed communion. Several of the choir members made sure to interrupt communion to show their displeasure.

One Sunday morning, my music minister came to me, beside himself, and told me that he had people in the choir room saying hideous things about others in the church and having slanderous conversations – things that had no place in a church, or *anywhere*, and these people were about to sing and lead a church in worship. I told him I just couldn't allow that. I decided that we wouldn't sing that Sunday. Instead, we would read Scripture. A third of the people walked out of the church service because there was no music. On Monday morning, the church office was filled with complaints over the benching of the choir.

I found myself praying more and more during this time. On average, I would spend 4 – 6 hours in prayer every day, because things were that difficult. I was also having a challenging time in my marriage –

Carol and I were struggling to communicate with each other. We just seemed to be on different wavelengths. It was altogether a very difficult time. Looking back, I had given God permission to be the Lord of every kingdom of my heart, and I can now see that He was truly taking control of every kingdom that was within me.

When I had first arrived in Corpus Christi, I put an advertisement on Craigslist, saying that I was a Baptist pastor looking for an atheist, an agnostic, or someone that didn't believe what I did, to have coffee with me every week and just talk about life. I didn't want to debate religion or politics, I just wanted to hear their views on life. The man who answered that advertisement was a retired Coast Guard pilot, named "Greg" who was trying to recapture the 1960's and had a strong dislike for anything relating to church or Christianity. But he really liked me – in fact, we became best friends. What was fascinating about this man was that he loved computers. Every time he would buy a new computer, he would give me his old one, with the understanding that he would clean all of the pornography off of them first. Greg even gave me the computer that began our television ministry at the church. My friendship with Greg was my one piece of sanity during my difficult time at the church and in my marriage. I was so grateful for his friendship.

As we continued through 2008, the Lord asked me another question. He said, "You have given Me everything in your life which you were willing to give Me, and I have taken those things you weren't willing to give Me. But there are things in your life that need to die. They just need to go. They have no

place in you. Do you give Me permission to kill off those things in you?" The picture he gave me came from my police days. I remember a few calls as a police officer where somebody had attempted to commit suicide by shooting themselves, and when they pulled the trigger, they flinched, and so instead of killing themselves they ended up disfigured for life. That was the picture the Lord gave me as He said, "If I allow you to deal with those things, you'll flinch, because they're too frightening, they're too painful. But if you'll allow Me to do it, I'll do it with precision."

I said to God, "Lord, I've come this far. I want You to have everything. I want to be dead to myself and have that Galatians 2:20 life, where it You living in and through me. I give you permission." I must admit, the next two months were the most painful months of my life. I literally cried day and night. My intercessor would tell me, "The Lord is making you unbreakable." I would say, "Is He saying anything else?" And she would say to me, "Proverbs 3:5-6: trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your path."

The Lord came to me a sixth time with the question of apostleship. He said, "I have asked you to be an apostle in My kingdom. Will you forfeit, or are you going to say yes?" I just wept and soaked the carpet with my tears. I said, "Lord, I'm afraid. I'm not qualified. But I don't want to miss out on what You have for me. The answer is yes." As soon as I said that, the Lord commanded me to get up and walk around the church. He directed me to specific areas and had me cast out the demonic presences that were there. My intercessor had been down in the auditorium praying that day, and as I came down the hall she

caught me and said, “What is going on here? As I pray, I see demonic spirits being thrown out of this building.” I told her what had happened. In that moment, the Lord had given me glimpses of what was ahead.

As spring was coming to a close, I found myself under more attack at the church. Those who were opposing me were vicious – there were ongoing email campaigns, spreading rumors about me and my staff. At every turn, they were seeking to create havoc in my life. I had a woman from the choir come to my wife and tell her that I was the worst man in the world, besides being the worst pastor. She just tore my wife apart. The list of encounters goes on. I had never seen anything like it, nothing was off limits for these folks.

By my 38th birthday, I couldn't take it anymore. Things were tough at home, we weren't communicating and I wasn't sure our marriage would survive. Things were horrible at the church, and yet God was not giving me permission to leave. I couldn't get the church turned around and the Lord was taking my dreams away from me. He was asking for my goals, my aspirations, my self image. He was asking for everything. I felt terrible. On my birthday, I ended up curled up in a fetal position on a rug in my office, weeping. My music minister came in and said, “Carl, what's the matter with you?” I said, “Edwin, I don't know what I said yes to, but I know I don't like it. I've never hurt so bad in my life. I just want it to stop.”

So, as I cried in my office, telling Edwin I didn't know what to do, he made a very profound

statement: “You gave the Lord permission to do this. You didn't care when He was clipping your fingernails, but right now He's got your chest wide open and He's doing open heart surgery. But look at the sterile environment He's had you in. You've been under attack and yet nobody's could harm you. Let God finish what He has started.” I thanked him, I hugged him, and as he left I said, “Lord I trust You take me the rest of the way.”

A week later, I got the sense that I'd come to the end of the journey. A peace came over me. I received an interesting email from the man I had prayed with in the garage. I hadn't heard from him for a while, and the email wasn't addressed to me, but it was about me. It said, “You've allowed yourself to go through this process and journey. You no longer see this world as a man of flesh, through fleshly eyes, but you see this world through eyes of the spirit – you are a spirit led man. Go forth in the spirit, in boldness and authority.” I sat back and I felt the Lord's arms around me, letting me know that the process that He had started 6 months before seemed to be coming to an end.

A few days later, my oldest son graduated from high school. My mom was unable to attend his graduation because she had developed a skin eating bacteria on her arm that refused to heal. In fact, no matter what antibiotic the doctors tried, they couldn't get the skin infection to go away. After his graduation was over, the Lord prompted me one afternoon to call my mom and pray for her. I asked her if she had oil in her house. She didn't have any olive oil, but she had cooking oil. She said, “Is that ok?” and I told her, “You know, I don't think the Lord cares. I'm going to pray for you, and the reason I want

the oil is because the book of James commands us that if any of you are sick, call the elders, anoint the sick and pray the prayer of faith, and I just believe I'm supposed to pray over you today. I want you to take the oil and smear it over that spot on your arm, and place your hand on it.” I prayed for her. “In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to be healed. I command your flesh to be made whole, your skin to be that of a newborn child.” I asked my mom to call me if anything happened. The next day, I got a phone call from her. She told me that she sat there for an hour after I prayed for her and was afraid to look at her arm. Finally, she got the courage to lift her hand and when she did, her skin was made whole and it was new flesh. It was also in the form of a cross. She also got a call from her sister who said to her, "Something happened, didn't it?" Now, my aunt has been involved in witchcraft and other occult things and is not a follower of Jesus, so her call was curious. My mom told my aunt what had happened and she asked my mom "Would Carl pray for my friend? She is on her deathbed in the hospital." My mom told me later that many people who did not believe in Jesus would come and ask her if they could touch her arm, and they would ask how did that happen? And she would tell them the story.

Anyway, I agreed to pray for the woman. I asked God what I should do. How would I pray for this woman? She was at a distance and I didn't want my aunt to lay hands on her, simply because we were unequally yoked. The Lord instructed me to have a picture sent, and to pray over that picture. She went in to surgery that week and I prayed over the picture. She died on the operating table, but then moments later was revived. Two days later she walked out of the hospital under her own strength. My aunt sent a message to me saying “Thank you for praying, God has healed my friend.”

Over the next few weeks I also ended up praying for about fourteen different people who came to me needing healing. One of them was a woman named Belinda. She was the wife of a friend of mine and she had a tumor in her breast. They were going in that afternoon to do a biopsy and determine whether it was cancerous or not. She came by, we laid hands on her and anointed her with oil. We prayed asking God for her healing. She came back with her husband that afternoon elated – not only was the tumor gone, but they could see by the position of the cells where the tumor had been, so even its outline was visible, yet there was no tumor there. I saw the miracles of scripture come to life, and I was amazed and astounded. I hadn't seen anything like it before.

Two days later, the Lord instructed me to spend a week in prayer and fasting, a modern day sack cloth and ashes. He gave me Daniel 9, to pray over the church, over the city and over the nation. So, every day I went to the church in a t-shirt and jeans, barefooted, no jewelry, and I sat in darkness and prayed Daniel 9. The Lord began to show me images of things that were horrific – things that were to come in the United States and our world that were disturbing. I don't even have permission to talk about them to this day. I felt a sense of urgency as I was praying. Several intercessors came and prayed with me. They each told me that they were hearing that I was like Jeremiah, because I was calling the church to repentance – not just my church, but the church as a whole.

The Lord had been asking me to be an apostle, and I had been holding back because I didn't believe He would perform signs and wonders through me. But He showed me that He would when He had all of me. It was a painful, difficult journey, but when I was willing to yield to Him, He did amazing

things through me. It was funny – the young man I was mentoring at that time –was going through a similar journey. The Lord was asking him, “Will you step up and serve Me?” He kept saying: “No, I need evidence. I need proof.” I kept telling him, “God's not going to show you anything until you say yes.” I remember coming out of my prayer time one day and on my motorcycle was a sticky note that said “YES.” God had gotten a hold of his heart.

As I came to the end of that week of prayer and fasting, something else happened. Earlier in the year I had been approached by a friend of mine who ran a Christian school. He was asking if his school could buy the back half of our campus. It was set up with school buildings and had room for athletic fields as well. We were renting it at the time to a charter school for troubled kids. Their lease was going to be up and it had not been a healthy relationship. I approached the church about selling the back half of the campus to this Christian school. The price that they had offered us was \$750,000. The church rejected it because it wasn't enough money. Now, I knew at that point that we would pay a price. I knew that the Lord was testing us to see where our hearts were. My sense of that was confirmed on June 20th. It was a Friday night and I'd been in prayer and fasting, sack cloth and ashes if you will, all week. I was going to baptize my daughter that Sunday. She had given her life to the Lord and wanted to be baptized. As I was watching TV, the Lord came to me and said, “I have a new message for you.” I wrote down what He was showing me, and it was the most devastating, horrific message I have ever been given for a church. And I said, “Lord, I don't want to speak this. I don't want to preach it.” The Lord then took me to Ezekiel, and said "Woe to the watchmen on the walls, the blood is on your hands if you don't sound the

warning." Well, I knew I didn't want that either. I said "Ok, Lord. I don't want to bargain with You, but this is an intense message and I'm not going to speak it unless three people confirm it by noon tomorrow. I'm going to ask my intercessor and another friend to pray for me and those two don't count." So, the next morning I went to the church. As I was praying, four different people come up to me before noon and told me, "I don't know what it is you're wrestling with, but you need to go through with it." I knew with certainty that this was the message I had to deliver the next morning.

The next morning, it was time to preach and I stepped out onto the platform to take my place at the podium. The Lord had told me, "Leave your identity behind," so I came out barefoot, in a t-shirt, no jewelry on, no watch, no ring, my identification locked in my filing cabinet, and I stood before the church and said "Church, the Lord is done contending with you. You need to repent, and He is bringing you to the ground. He is going to destroy your church, because it's His church and He's going to reclaim it. He's going to strip it out of your hands. Repent and know His mercy. But realize His judgment is upon you."

Forty years earlier, the church had forced out the original pastor. They thought he was too old. They had done it in an ungodly way and many of the old timers had told me they felt like the church had been placed under a 40-year curse at that point. When you looked at the church's history, there was a lot of accuracy to that assessment. The church had gone through almost non-stop calamity during that period. I was the man who was sent at the forty-year mark and I had offered repentance and a new

direction to the church. God's redemption had been refused and the Lord was done contending with them as a group of people. As you might imagine, that message got a less than supportive response. A third of the people walked out of the back door, a third sat in their seats, stunned, and a third were on their face weeping. Within twenty-four hours there was a petition with fifty-two names on it calling me to account for how I could say such horrible, hurtful things. I had called the building an idol, I had called the choir an idol, and people were angry. The chairman of the deacons came to me and said "Why are you so angry with us?" And I said "You know, I'm not angry with you. This is the message I was given to speak. I didn't have a choice." Well, needless to say, the tensions just got worse from that point on.

People came and accused me of all sorts of misdeeds. I called each person that had signed the petition and asked to meet with them. I told them that the way to handle differences was not to sign a petition against me but to meet with me. Only two agreed to come and both of them never gave me a chance to speak. They just told me how much they hated me. It was a very lonely time in my life. I kept asking the Lord, "Will you let me leave?" He said "No, you don't get to leave."

We got to August and I got a call one afternoon. I'd been preaching through the book of Mark and of course I'm an expository preacher so I preach verse by verse. It was the chairman of the deacons and he asked to visit with me. He had some concerns. He arrived with another deacon to witness the conversation. He began with "Why are you so mad at us?" I said "I'm not mad at you, I'm simply having to preach what the Lord gives me." His next question was "Why do you pray so much?" I spent the next hour being interrogated on why I prayed as much as I did. Then he said, "Why are you talking so much

about healing?" I said "Well, I preach verse by verse and that's what the first half of the book of Mark is filled with." He said "Yeah, but you're praying for people for healing." And I said, "You know what, the Lord tells me to do that, it's in Scripture. You seem to have a problem with what God might do here. So instead of me arguing with you, let me make a phone call." I called up my Mom and she told the story of her healing. When she was done, our conversation was over. There was nothing they could say. The whole time the Lord told me something interesting: "You don't need to defend yourself. I am your defender. Through all these attacks, you don't need to defend yourself. Be still, I will defend you."

I took the opportunity to go to a minister's prayer retreat in September. I still didn't know what the future held in terms of the church at this point, but I was committed to stay the course. The initial shock of the June message was over and things had died down to a dull roar. Interestingly enough, I watched several other churches in the community go through a similar process. In fact, by the time I left Corpus Christi, I watched as seven churches were put to the test by the Lord. In each instance, an outside pastor had been brought in, they had addressed the sin in the church, and the church made a choice. In 6 of those 7 cases, I watched the church make the wrong choice and they paid the price for it.

September, 2008, it was our church's turn to face the consequences of the decisions that had been made. When I returned from the prayer retreat, I was met by the church treasurer in the hallway, where he told me "We're bouncing checks." I said, "Really? Ok, let me see your numbers." He produced a set of financial numbers for me. I went to the financial secretary who was also my secretary, and I said, "Let

me see your numbers." Now I had told the church that they needed to audit their books ever since I had arrived. It had been over 10 years since they had done that. My secretary produced a second set of numbers, and they didn't match. I told them to go to the bank and find out what they had on hand and work with those numbers going forward.

I discovered that somewhere in the past, the church had tied their general checking account to their designated funds account, and because they were not able to meet budget, they had slowly drained both accounts. To keep the church running – just to turn the lights on, pay the property insurance, and have myself and my staff come to work each day, it was costing \$47,000 per month. The church was only bringing in about \$18,000 per month. This had gone on for years. The treasurer came back, and said we had depleted both the checking account and the designated funds account. This presented a serious problem. By law, designated accounts have to be maintained. The only way they can be liquidated is through permission of the donor or a vote of the church. I shook his hand and congratulated him by saying "You're insolvent."

The Lord's word to the church was unfolding before my eyes – He was bringing them down. I called the leaders together and said we needed to meet every night to develop a plan of action. The chairman of the deacons refused to come. He didn't want to get in the middle of it. I ended up having to develop the plan myself. I came up with three options. The first was that the church could keep their ministry, but they would need to downsize: change locations, and put their beloved property up for sale.

The second was that the church could keep their property, but they would lose their ministry and their staff. The third was that maybe it was time to let somebody else have a chance to reach the community – shut down, sell the property, and give that money to missions. When it came time for the church to make that decision, within 45 minutes the decision was made to keep the buildings and forego the ministry. My staff were to be laid off thirty days later, and they asked me if I would stay, but I told them "No, I need to resign. I need to do what my staff are doing. I refuse to sacrifice them for my own sake. You haven't followed me. You brought me here saying you were ready to make changes that you weren't ready to make. You've fought me all the way. You've not listened to the Lord calling you to repentance, and it's pointless for me to stay here, so I'm going to resign as well."

I began to pray about what to do next. I knew that thirty days later, I would be without a job, and without any means of financial support. While I was in India earlier in the year, God had laid on my heart a very simplistic model for church. "What if you did away with owning property and paying salaries and used the resources of the church only to touch lives?" The fascinating thing about the church that I was leaving was that out of a three quarter of a million-dollar budget, their total budget for outreach was \$1500.

The whole purpose of the church had been lost somewhere along the way. The building had become an idol. The choir had become an idol. Reaching people with the message of Jesus had been lost in the background. As I prayed, the Lord showed me that I would start that simplistic model of church,

and so one afternoon in prayer He outlined for me what would become Simplicity Church Network: a network of churches and pastors who used house church meetings and simple modeled churches to reach people with the message of Jesus Christ.

I began to pray about where that should happen and the Lord showed me a building where I had sponsored a church planter. This church planter had fallen away – he had gone back to his life of drugs and immorality, and had hurt a lot of people along the way. But the place where he had planted his church was in the middle of a district of bars, prostitution and drug trade in Corpus Christi. The Lord showed me the exact store front and said "This is your place. It's time to reclaim ground." I remember being so excited about that thought and so as I told people what I was going to be doing, I told those that wanted to come with me "Realize, this is going to be hard work. This may not be a journey you want to take. It's not going to be like the church we're coming from, in fact, it's probably not going to be like anything you've ever done before."

I knew that the young man I was mentoring needed to come along with me, and that I would be grooming him and raising him up. I didn't want to sway his decision one way or another and so I asked the Lord to show me how that needed to be undertaken. He and I met for coffee one day. He told me "We feel like we're being released, that we're free to go, and that the Lord has something for us." I said, "Great. There's a parking lot – I want you to go sit in for a half hour, it's in the middle of Skid Row, and I want you to listen to whatever the Lord says to you." That afternoon he went with his wife, they sat

there, and then they called me and said, “We need to be a part of whatever you're doing.” That night we met at a McAllister’s Deli to discuss the vision, I believed God had given me and the ministry of Simplicity Church Network was born.

November 2nd, 2008, we launched Simplicity Church, Corpus Christi with twenty-eight people. It was such an exciting day. Our electricity hadn't been switched over yet, so we ended up meeting in the dark, illuminated by sunlight through the front windows. It was a store front. Across from us was the largest homosexual bar in Corpus Christi. We were surrounded by four more homosexual bars, and many heterosexual bars. There were thirty-nine drug houses that surrounded us within a six-block radius. There were no other churches within those six blocks. There were at least seventy-nine prostitutes who worked that area. I was excited about the things to come. The only problem was that I didn't know how I was going to support myself.

We were trying to raise funds, and I only had a handful of people who were offering to support me at that point. I began to send out resumes for some corporate jobs and my wife told me, “You realize you're not going to get any of those. I think the Lord is going to have us do this differently.” Well, sure enough, as I prayed, the Lord kept telling me, “I want you to live by faith. You have to trust Me for everything.”

Well, that was a little daunting, but I also knew that that was what He was telling me and Carol was affirming that as well. When I knew fully that she was in agreement, I surrendered to that thought

process and we began to live by faith. Now the thing that I haven't told you yet is that we still had a house for sale in Pennsylvania that had been for sale since before we moved to Texas nearly 2 years earlier. The pipes had frozen once and had to be replaced and once they were replaced they were stolen for the copper and needed to be replaced again. The oil tank had started leaking and had to be replaced. When the tank began leaking, the boiler had shut down, causing the pipes to freeze. Once the pipes were replaced, they were stolen again. We had already spent nearly \$25000 on a house we no longer lived in. In fact, we were burning through my retirement savings trying to keep this house afloat and pay rent somewhere. We were fortunate that a couple in our church had allowed us to live in their house but it was time to move on and the challenges became more and more difficult.

In spite of it all, we started out on our journey of living by faith. A few weeks later, a friend of mine asked me if I would do some consulting work for him and he offered to pay me. I was glad to have any sort of money coming in, so I agreed. We were still burning through our savings and still having problems with the house. We had some tenants move in and the roof had started leaking. They ended up moving out because we just couldn't afford to fix it. The consulting work I was doing was a lifeline during that difficult financial time. My friend and I had a good working relationship. He had asked me if I would help him sell a product line, and offered to hire me for \$2,000 a month. In my desperation, I grabbed that lifeline. It was only later that I realized I had done the wrong thing.

At the end of 2008, the house we were living in was being settled into an estate and we couldn't

live there any longer. We had to move by the end of the year. The problem was that we were down to \$60 and we had no idea where we would go and what we would do. We did a lot of praying, asking, seeking, knocking. I realized that the closest thing to what we could afford would probably be a mobile home. We took a day to go and have a look at a few mobile home parks, but they just really weren't for us. We were stuck. My intercessor was praying for us, and kept telling us: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. Proverbs 3:5-6." That day, as we left the mobile home park, my wife's phone rang and the voice at the other end said: "Hi, you were just at our house. My sister was here, and she's got a house on Padre Island. Padre Island is a coastal resort area, close to Corpus Christi. The house has just been vacated and needs some work done on it. She'd love for you to look at it."

We turned around and went to see the house. It was a beautiful brick home, with an in-ground swimming pool, but the house had been trashed. There were cigarette burns in the carpet and holes in the walls. I looked at the lady and said, "Here's the thing, we were paying \$380 a month where we were, but this house needs a lot of work. Could I trade you out the work for the next two months' rent? And then we'll pay you the normal rent from there?" She told me, "That sounds agreeable to me," and that was that! We scribbled out a crude agreement on a scrap piece of paper and formalized the agreement. The normal rent was \$1000 per month. I didn't know how we would pay that, but I knew that, at least for the next two months, we'd have a place to live. So, with \$60 to our name, we moved to Padre Island, less than half a mile from the Gulf of Mexico. We felt so blessed to be living the Island life.

In March of 2009, I woke up in the middle of the night with a question from the Lord: "Will you still follow me if it means you'll lose everything?" When that question was asked, I knew it was not so much a question, but an indication of where things were going. I also felt like I could say no, and the Lord would love me just as deeply as he does today. But, I also knew I'd miss out on His best if I did. I said "Yes Lord, if it means losing everything, I'll still follow You." Almost immediately, my wife woke up. The Lord was asking her the same question, and she too said "Lord, if it means losing everything, I'll still follow You."

Early in 2009 another interesting thing happened: I had been asked to sponsor a young church planter, Adams Sabila, in Kitale, Kenya. He was starting a Bible College that would train indigenous pastors in Uganda. Training church leaders throughout the world is a passion of mine – something I fell in love with in India – and so I was keen to get involved. We prayed together, and both agreed that it was something the Lord wanted done. I told him, "I'm not sure how I'm going to get there, but I know I need to come." We set the time for May of that year and through the sale of my co-pastor's vehicle and some other interesting provisions from the Lord, the money was raised for me to go. So I went. I told the man I was working for that I would be going to Africa and he wasn't pleased. He wanted me to stay and build the business with him, but I told him "My heart is ministry. That's what I need to do. That's what the Lord has called me to do." That's when I realized joining my friend in business had been a mistake. The Lord had told me to live by faith and trust Him, and Him alone. But in my fear, I had trusted in a man. I went to Africa, and I saw the Lord move in ways that I had never seen before. I saw

demons come out of people, people being healed and I started operating more deeply in my prophetic gifting. I saw new miracles take place and I watched God bring people together from diverse backgrounds. I watched people light up as we led the first graduation service for Redeemer Bible College in Bukwo, Uganda.

The most amazing thing that I saw happen – and this became my rallying cry for my ministry – was a town drunk and troublemaker having a miraculous encounter with Christ. I was preaching in Kapchesoy, Uganda and at the end of the sermon, the church erupted in cheers, dancing and celebration. I wasn't sure what was going on but then the pastor leaned over to me and said, "You see the young man in the front? He just gave his life to Jesus!"

"Wow that's great!" I said. People were just celebrating! It was unlike anything I'd ever seen! He leaned over again and said, "You don't understand – he's the village drunk and troublemaker. In fact, he and his friends go around beating people up and robbing them, especially Christians."

The guy was visibly drunk, so I went up to the front where he was teetering back and forth and I prayed with him for the spirit of drunkenness to be broken. The next day, before we even got started, the church erupted again. Three of this man's friends were at the front, giving their lives to Jesus. Apparently, while I was preaching the day before, they had been nearly two miles away cooking alcohol in a still and getting drunk. The young man, whose name was Godfrey, said he heard my voice telling him, "You come to the church and you give your life to Jesus Christ now." And he took off, running to the church.

He had run in the back door as I was sitting down and had given his life to Jesus. They were so moved by what they saw that they had come to give their lives to Jesus too.

A year later, Godfrey graduated from our Bible College. He's a teacher, and preaches around the Ugandan countryside. He's led over thirty people in his village to Christ. When I returned to Uganda in 2010, his mother grabbed me by the shoulders and said, "You keep preaching! You keep doing this! You keep doing what you do! My family's life is transformed because you were faithful."

During my stay in Kenya, we were stopped by a Kenyan policeman. He wanted to shake us down. He asked for my video camera and when I handed him my camera he immediately began to shake and couldn't talk anymore. He threw it back at me and told us to leave. Everyone said to me, "The anointing of God is on you." I didn't really know what they meant because it didn't make sense to me. I just see myself as Carl, with flaws and imperfections. I think that's the way it should be. But they were seeing something else. I have a better understanding now.

When I got back from Kenya and Uganda, my friend who I had been working for met with me and said, "The Lord told me to quit paying you." It was a blow to us financially. We were out of retirement savings, our house in Pennsylvania was falling down and we couldn't get it to sell. We were behind on all our bills, creditors were calling non-stop, and now my \$2,000 a month income had been taken away. Carol worked a part time internet job in Pennsylvania, and she also earned \$500 a month from my friend who had asked her to continue keeping books for him. But it wasn't enough to take care

of us and meet all of our household expenses.

Later, my friend came back to me with another Christian man. They sat me down and said, “You've been misled. You didn't hear God correctly. In fact, a man who doesn't take care of his family is worse than an unbeliever. You need to get a job.” That conversation hurt me deeply, and even though I knew in my heart that God was wanting me to live by faith, it bothered me. I shared the conversation with my overseers and they told me that I needed to do what the Lord was leading me to do. One of them told me that he had wanted to tell me a similar thing – that what I was doing was wrong and that I needed to get a job – but the Lord had told him, “Don't you dare. I'm taking him through this journey. It's like your wilderness journey. You need to let it go. He's doing exactly what I told him to do. He's hearing me correctly.” My conversation with my overseers was encouraging, but I was scarred by what my friend and the other man had said.

By summer of 2009, the day came when we didn't have any toilet paper, toothpaste, or food. All we could do was pray. My older son had gone off to college, so it was just the four of us. We prayed, “Lord we don't know how You are going to take care of us, but we need You.” At six o'clock that evening, there was a knock on the door. It was a friend of mine, saying “You were on my heart today, and I thought I'd bring some stuff over. Here's \$20, and a box with a few dry goods.” It was just what we needed. We ended the night with food, toilet paper, and toothpaste.

By August, things were really bad. We had no money, we hadn't made a house payment on our

house in Pennsylvania, and we were struggling to pay rent as Carol's entire salary barely covered it. At that point I decided I'd had enough. I felt that my friends were right – I had been misled. I needed to start looking for a job. I called my dad and asked him what he thought about it. He said, "You need to take care of your family." So, I lined up two corporate jobs – one with a Lens Crafters store as a general manager and the other as a contractor with the federal government. Both were very good-paying jobs and they were both offered to me. It was time to make the decision.

My wife and I had been married nearly 20 years. In that time, she had only yelled at me one other time. This day would be the second time in our marriage she had yelled at me. She was standing in the living room, prayer journal in hand, and she said, "If you do this, you're wrong. You know that God has told you about what you need to do. You know you must trust Him for everything. And even though it would be easier, it's the wrong thing to do, and if you do it, this is all in vain!" She threw her prayer journal down, and we were crying and I'm screaming, "You know Carol, we could become homeless!" She said, "I know that. But I'm willing to go there if that's what it takes." Well, I knew I couldn't argue with that. My wife was willing to go the distance with me. I knew in my heart that God wasn't asking me to give in and do what was easy. He was asking me to follow Him. I called up both companies and I said, "I'm sorry, I won't be coming to work for you. I appreciate your offer." I called my dad up, and he said, "Which job did you take?" I said, "Dad, I didn't take either one. I've sent the lifeboat away." He said, "You what?" I said, "I sent the lifeboat away. I know that's not what God's asking me to do." And then my dad said something that really startled me: "You know what, you've got to do what the Lord is telling you,

even if that's uncomfortable." I really took comfort in that, as I knew this was not something my dad would normally say.

As we moved on, the ministry saw some interesting things happen. God moved in people's lives in amazing ways. We interacted with a lot of street people, and met a prostitute named Diane. The Lord told Carol and me that we needed to take her into our home. Our daughter Caitlyn, at that time eight years old, gave up her bedroom for Diane, and moved into her brother's room. It was an amazing picture – an eight-year-old girl giving up her room and her bed so that a woman who had sold her body and abused it with drugs could have a loving home. One of the things I learned very quickly though, is that people on the streets don't know how to handle normal life, and it takes more than a desire to change – they must fully surrender. Diane wasn't ready to do that. One afternoon, while Carol and I were having lunch and talking in our room, Diane left our home and ran away. I never did understand that, but I saw that take place time and time again down on Skid Row. People would come in, we would love them, feed them, clothe them, but they couldn't handle normal life, so they would go back to what they knew before. The enemy weaves a deep lie in people's lives, and the ministry in Skid Row became thankless. We lost the core group that we had started with very quickly, and it was down to Mike and Kim, their family and just a handful of other people.

In September, I went back to India and met my friend Tom Blackaby there. Tom had met me online – after I had commented on one of his blog posts. The Blackabys are very well known in Christian

circles as authors and speakers. Tom had asked to accompany me to India.

I had set my time to go to India, and again, I didn't know how I would get there. We were six days out from the trip, and people were asking me, "Are you still coming?" I said, "Yes, I'll be there. I just don't know how." Five days out from the trip, I watched the miraculous unfold. Starting at about ten o'clock in the morning, every two hours there would be a knock on my door, and somebody would hand me a wad of cash and say, "I was praying and felt I had to give this to you." I had only met some of those people once! That last knock came at ten o'clock that night. I received \$400, and I had enough to go to India. I booked my ticket and prepared to leave a few days later.

The Lord moved in such a powerful way there. I saw his power working through me. I watched miracles of deliverance. I saw a demon come out of a man as I preached – it was an amazing thing. I was preaching by a river in Kerala, and I said, "Yahweh – He is God!" I heard a scream in the back, and a man was thrown violently into the river. The demon was trying to drown him, but it was cast out quickly. Today, I'm happy to report that that man and his family are followers of Christ.

The Lord showed me what power He has. He showed me how I could speak into somebody's life in a powerful way. He stretched me greatly during that time. It was a long trip – I spent three weeks there. I rode in cattle car freight trains all over the place. Sometimes I wasn't sure if I would make it home safely, but the Lord was there every step of the way.

Once I returned home, as the year progressed, things got tougher. We were completely out of

money, and couldn't pay our November rent. We had asked some people to pray for us, and someone ended up paying our rent for us that month. We wondered what the future held for us. It didn't look promising at all. We also learned that the house we were renting was embroiled in a family dispute. Our landlord had been lying to us about the ownership of the property and had been telling the family that she was living there with us.

By December, we still couldn't pay rent. The landlady came to see us and we explained our financial situation. She told us that she needed us to leave and gave us through the end of the month. We were stuck. We had nothing left. The friend that I had worked for went to my overseers and reiterated that I was making a mistake, that I had not heard God correctly, and that I was going to destroy my family. He wanted to sit in on my overseer meetings with them along with the other man who had confronted me. My overseers and I agreed that it was inappropriate. I knew what the Lord was saying to me. When we told him no, he responded by sending my wife an email in the middle of the night, telling her that her services were no longer necessary. We were on the verge of being homeless, with no other income except my wife's part time internet job. Things were bleak.

That Christmas we were joined by extended family. Carol's sister came to see us with her family, and they spent a few days after Christmas with us. When they left, I began to take everything off the walls. It was time to go. Everyone was in tears. I was beside myself. I didn't know what to do. I just knew we had to be out of there. I was pulling things off the wall, and putting things in piles to be packed. Carol

and the kids were in the bedrooms. Forty-five minutes later, my daughter appeared and was holding a piece of paper in her hand. She was shaking and trembling. She said, "Collin asked me to give this to you." Collin is my middle son, and at that time he was eleven years old. I was stunned by the letter. It read:

Do not panic you fools, was I not there for you before? Was I not there for you in the time of need? Was I not there for the Israelites, or Shadrach, Meshach or Abednego? Do not doubt Me. The Lord has spoken.

I said, "Caitlyn, where's your brother?" She went to fetch him, and he came out trembling and shaking. I asked him to tell me about the note. He said, "I was about to turn on my music and listen to Michael W. Smith, and the Lord told me I couldn't. He told me that you needed to hear the words of the songs. You needed to hear what was on the radio, you needed to hear what He was saying to you."

"Were you afraid to give this to me because you thought you would be in trouble?" I asked him. He said, "Yes."

I was heartbroken. The Lord was speaking to me through an eleven-year-old boy, reminding me that He was in charge, and that I needed to trust Him. We slowed up on the packing, but the deliverance we were hoping for didn't come. I hoped the Lord would send a deliverer or a redeemer – somebody who would pay the rent or buy the house, or somehow make it possible for us to stay. But that's not what happened. The Lord took us to a desolate place.

On January 7th of 2010, my 21st wedding anniversary, Carol and I packed a U-Haul truck all night. Our kids stayed in a motel room with a friend of ours. We loaded up our possessions not knowing what the morning would bring. The next morning our children were taken to school, and Carol and I packed up our dog, our two cats, and our fish. I gave the keys to the landlord and drove to a Walmart parking lot where we cried. We were homeless.

You see, I never thought God would take me there. I thought that because I was doing His work He would make a way. But He didn't. It really took me for a spin. I was devastated when God didn't help me pay my bills. My reputation was destroyed. I was known as the guy who delivered that message in on June 22, 2008, because he was mad at the church. I was the guy who had taken on a project in Skid Row. I was the guy who wasn't taking care of his family and God wasn't bailing me out. I was angry with God. In the days leading up to this moment, I frequently had what we came to affectionately call a "blue chair moment." I had a big blue recliner in the living room and I would sit there, yelling and screaming at God, telling Him how angry I was. As quickly as I would say such horrible things, I would repent, because I knew my heart was wrong.

God was showing me was that He was doing to me what we humans do to a toothpaste tube when there's hardly anything left at the bottom of it. You squeeze it and you roll it, you press it and flatten it to get every bit of toothpaste out of the tube. The Lord was squeezing out every bit of junk that was inside of me, putting it in front of me so I could see how bad it really was. I thought I had come so

far. I had surrendered everything, made God the Lord of my life, died to myself, seen miracles, signs and wonders... and yet, I realized that I was still a sinner and in need of a Savior. I realized that there was so much darkness in me that I didn't even realize was there.

As we sat in that Walmart parking lot, we prayed and called the people closest to us, my overseers and my co-pastor, and some amazing things happened. My co-pastor told me, "My wife and I have known for some time now that you're supposed to live with us. You need to come here and you can stay for as long as you need to. We're supposed to take care of you." One of my overseers said, "I have a man in my church who owns a storage facility, let me call him." A little while later he called me back and said, "You have a place to unload the truck. You're free to use it for as long as you need to, no charge to you." He also said, "My church and I want to give you and your family a hotel room, I know it's your anniversary. We're going to give you the weekend as a gift from our church. Be blessed. We're also going to provide meals for you and your co-pastor's family for the next week, to help you all get settled."

God was providing for us. I had said yes, and yes was taking me to a very desolate place. One of my greatest fears was losing everything. But the Lord had been preparing me. I had lost everything in a tornado in 2002, I had lost a child in 2003, I had lost my business and financial gains in Pennsylvania – all of those experiences had been preparation.

We unloaded the truck at the storage facility and learned that we had been given one of the larger storage units. I vowed that after I closed the unit door, I would not open it again until it was time to

move. I believed that the Lord would bail me out in a few weeks, and that this was just a temporary challenge. We moved over to Mike and Kim's house and unloaded the rest of our things. Now I need to tell you, Mike and Kim had two small children, both under the age of three. We had two children, one in elementary school, and one in junior high. So, there we were: eight people in a 1,300-square foot house. During our first week, the kids were playing hide and seek and messing with the pocket door to our bedroom. They ended up pulling it so hard that it broke. Carol and I ended up living behind a curtain as our only privacy barrier. As you might imagine, that was quite interesting. Being a married couple, you had to ask questions that you never thought you'd be asking, like, "What's the sign if we need a little bit of intimacy?" For those of you who are curious, the sign was to throw a towel into the hall. We would schedule times when one family would take the kids, and the joke was that when you heard the garage door open, you had thirty seconds. That's what life became like.

In our first couple of weeks living together, the Lord told Mike to quit his job and live by faith. He had been a manager for Coca-Cola and was making a good salary. Now there were two families living under one roof, being supported by two part-time jobs from our wives. Kim was an interpreter for the deaf and Carol was working for the same internet lighting company. Amazingly, we never missed a meal. Somehow, the bills got paid. Somehow, the house payment always got made.

Shortly before we became homeless, the Lord woke me up one night with a picture of an Amway meeting. Amway is a network marketing company. My wife and I had been asked to join the company twenty-three years earlier, and we had been so turned off by the way we had been approached that we said we would never be a part of that kind of business. But the Lord told me: "Here's your business. This is what you're going to learn how to do, and you're going to match it up to the internet so that it's mobile, and so that you can leverage technology to build the business. It will give you the freedom to travel as you need to." I continued to learn the business, even as we became acclimated to our new environment.

As we approached the spring of 2010, the Lord hadn't bailed us out. We were still living with Mike and Kim. I had the invitation to go to Africa again, and I knew I needed to go. I didn't know how I'd get there. A few people would show up from time to time wanting to contribute to the trip. My atheist friend Greg, who I used to meet with every week for coffee, contacted me and offered me all his

computers. There were ten laptops in total, and they paid for my trip to Africa. As I traveled, a couple of things happened: A volcano in Iceland had erupted, and air traffic over Europe was shut down. My flight was delayed by five days, and I missed the first conference I was supposed to speak at. Once I got to Kenya, the driver who had been hired continued to extort money from Pastor Adams and ripped us off, until we were out of money. When we reached Kitale, I had no way of getting anywhere else. I called Carol and said, "You know, maybe I just need to come home, if I can get back to Nairobi." Carol told me: "No, the Lord has a reason for you being there; you stay. He's going to do what he wants to do."

The Lord used those times that I couldn't travel to point out to Adams and I those who we needed to work with, and those who we didn't need to work with. I finally got to go up to Mount Elgon where the original conference had been. The people had stayed there an extra day, waiting for me to come, and I was able to minister to them. I got to be a part of the second graduation ceremony of Redeemer Bible College and had the privilege of seeing Godfrey graduate too.

When it came time to return to the United States, I didn't have the money to hire a driver, and I didn't have a way to get to Nairobi for my return flight. Once again, Mike and Kim made a big sacrifice: they sold a vehicle and paid for my trip from Eldoret to Nairobi, and got me home. This was the second vehicle they had sold to make help me and once again, I had seen the Lord's miraculous provision.

It was amazing an amazing experience – while I was gone, I would call Carol and say, "We need to go to Uganda today," or "We need to go here, and we don't have the money." We would pray, and

then somebody would show up in the United States and hand Carol money, saying: "Carl's really been on my heart. Use this however you need to." She would wire the money to me and we would go to the next place. On another occasion, I had led a conference high in the mountains of Uganda. When the conference was over, Pastor Adams excused me and asked the participants to collect an offering so we could get back to Kenya. They not only sacrificed for the travel, but they also paid for guest room near the border. That's the way the trip came together. I watched God provide every step of the way – sometimes He didn't provide in my time frame, but He always provided. He got me where I needed to be, when I needed to be there and He brought my back to my family.

Back home, I had started building my online business and I was starting to make a few commissions: \$15 – \$20 at a time. It wasn't enough to get by, and unexpectedly Carol lost her job at the internet lighting company as they wanted all their staff to be in Pennsylvania. There were nights where I would sit and cry at the dining room table, telling Mike, Kim and Carol that I felt like such a failure. I celebrated my fortieth birthday as a homeless man. I said, "Here I am: you guys are feeding us, you're providing a roof over our heads... I can't even take care of my family." And they would continue to speak into my life, "God has told us to take care of you. Be okay with it." They would remind me of Elijah and the widow and her son. God was providing through them and they considered it a privilege. I was so humbled by that. I would weep myself to sleep so many nights. Knowing that many were telling them to kick us out, their faith and perseverance still amaze me.

Day by day, I would sit on the bed in the bedroom – that was my office, my living room, and my bedroom. I was there with my laptop, that Greg had given me, building a blog, writing about internet marketing, writing about network marketing, learning how to build businesses, and slowly my commissions began to grow. I remember being so excited the first time a \$100 commission check arrived.

During that time, my pajamas ripped out, and I no longer had pajamas to sleep in. I was having to sleep in my underwear. This was very uncomfortable to me, since we were only separated from the house by a curtain and it was not unusual to have a child run into the room unexpectedly. Carol had begun working for a friend of mine, Shawn, part time and he asked me, "What do you really need, Carl?" and I said, "There are so many needs – just whatever God lays on your heart." He said to me, "No, what do you personally need?" And I said, "I'll be honest, I don't even have pajamas to wear. I'm sleeping in my underwear behind a curtain." He took me to JC Penny's and bought me two pairs of pajamas. I still wear those pajamas today. I still tear up a little bit talking about how humbling it was for me to have somebody buying my pajamas. Another man, at that.

Shawn and I had met through a mutual acquaintance and in May of 2010 he had called me up and said, "Listen, I have to go on military deployment, do you think your wife would mind managing my company for me for about four weeks while I'm gone?" I said, "Yeah, I'm sure she would be open to it," and we were thrilled just to have some income, even if it was \$100 a week. Carol did such a good job

that he asked if she would stay on and her duties began to expand. At that point I was just trying to grow the business. Any money I earned from it was reinvested.

In the days when I earned \$36,000 a month as financial advisor, we loved to give to people. I loved doing it, and there I was on the receiving end and it was tough for me. God was breaking me of my pride – keeping me in a business that I didn't think would go anywhere. And yet, it continued to gain momentum. People began to know who I was. The commission checks started to grow. It wasn't enough to support a family, but it was an extra \$300 – \$400 that we didn't have before.

Eventually, I decided to shut down what was left of my financial advisory practice. I still had a few clients and that was bringing in a few hundred dollars a month, here and there, but I knew it wasn't right for me to be managing people's money as a homeless man. I also knew that I didn't want to be managing people's money in the future and I didn't feel it was part of God's plan for my future. I closed that part of my business, and I got involved in a gold and silver network marketing company. I began to build a decent business there. But it still wasn't enough to support a family, and I found myself crying night after night.

Christmas came and went, 2010 ended and we were still homeless. I couldn't believe that it had been nearly a year. My twenty-second anniversary came and went, then came my forty-first birthday, we celebrated both of these as a homeless family. Carol's duties began to increase with my friend's company – that was helpful. It allowed me to reinvest more into my business. We were finally able to start paying

bills again, even if we couldn't afford a rent payment.

Meanwhile, things had come to a standstill in the church. Mike's family and my family were the only members left, and we didn't know what to do. We prayed about whether the Lord wanted us to shut down the church or should we press on. We felt the Lord telling us, "I want you to meet every night – seven days a week. Preach the gospel whether anyone's here or not. Preach to the empty chairs." And so we did. We began preaching to empty chairs, night after night after night after night. After nine months, the Lord told us to stop and an amazing thing happened. People began to come into the church, and they couldn't tell us why they were there. But as they walked by, you would literally watch them out the window as though something had grabbed them and would make them turn and come straight through our front door. Most of them would look around bewildered and ask, "Is this a church? It's like something grabbed me. I don't know why I'm here." We watched the Lord gradually change the environment of the neighborhood. As we came to the end of 2010, I knew that Mike was ready to take over leadership. It was time for me to hand it over to him. Mike began leading the church in early 2011. Shortly thereafter, the Lord showed me that I needed to break away and begin a new work. Carol and I and our family began to meet as a house church and shortly thereafter began meeting with another family on Padre Island as well.

I had planned to go to India in March, 2011, but the money never came together, and again I was discouraged and angry with the Lord. I didn't understand. I told Him: "You've called me to the nations,

and yet you're not allowing me to go." I was not only distraught by not getting to go to India, but I also didn't understand how the Lord could send me there twice before and not let me go back. I didn't get to go back to Africa either. I was heartbroken. We continued to work on the business, and day by day it grew. Carol's business relationship with my friend and his company grew, and things were starting to flow smoothly – not to the point that we could stand on our own two feet, but enough that we were starting to pay the bills. The collectors weren't calling anymore, which was a huge victory in itself.

As we got to August 2011, two amazing things happened. Finally, our house in Pennsylvania sold. We had originally listed it for \$132,000 and now over 4 years later it was scheduled to be in foreclosure two weeks later. It sold for \$20,000 dollars and the bank accepted the offer. Taking over a \$100,000 loss. In the midst of the pre-foreclosure process we found an unexpected blessing. The government, because of the economic downturn, had created a program that would pay your \$10,000 for the short-sale of your home to avoid foreclosure. Since the bank accepted the short sale offer, we were able to take advantage of that program. After realtor's fees and all the other sale expenses, we had about \$4,000 dollars left over. It helped us to pay off some bills and lifted our spirits.

There was a network marketing conference coming up in Orlando, Florida in the fall that I knew I needed to be at for internet marketing, so I used the additional money to purchase my tickets to that conference as well.

That month, a friend of ours called. She managed a beach front condo, and the beach front condo

wasn't rented out and she said, "Would you like to come and live in it until we rent it out again? It's not rented out again for the next six weeks, you guys are free to use it." What a glorious announcement that was! We moved into a one bedroom beach front condo. You could sit on the deck and look over the sea – it was an amazing thing. I felt like we had a new lease on life and that maybe things were beginning to turn around. The house had sold, we had a little bit of money left from that sale, there was still a little money left in Carol's retirement fund. I felt like everything was just going to take off. I headed to the conference in Orlando in October, 2011 with a renewed sense of hope.

I had met some great guys online, they had helped me grow my business, and while I was there I was told about a new company that was launching, and I was asked to be a part of it. I was also told that I would have to spend \$625 to do that. While I was at the conference, I learned that we had had to move out of the condo. Carol and my kids were staying in a motel room. Mike and Kim had taken in someone from the church, and so even the place we had been staying was no longer available. We were homeless again. We also knew it was time for us to leave the “Noah’s ark” that Mike and Kim’s house had been. There was no turning back.

Shortly before the condo was offered to us, the Lord had told me that I needed to go to our storage unit. We had sold a camper we had had to a homeless family living on the beach, and I needed to get the title for the camper. The Lord told me to stand there and prophesy to my furniture. I didn't really know what that meant, but I prayed and the Lord gave me the valley of dry bones from Ezekiel as a

template. Over the next few months, the Lord sent me to the storage unit at least three other times to prophesy over the furniture. Now we were completely homeless again, sitting in parking lots and praying. But this time our perspective was different. "Lord You've brought us this far. We've seen You provide for two families, eight people, on two small incomes. We can trust you." As we sat and prayed with a friend, it occurred to me that there was a condo next door to us where Carol had an Avon customer. Carol went in, asked if there were any condos to rent, and low and behold, her customer had a studio condo up for rent. She agreed to rent it to us. It had one room and a bathroom, and we were thrilled. It cost \$700 a month, and we paid it that day. That left us with another \$700 to either pay the next month's rent or to join the new business. We prayed about our decision, and we knew we needed to join the business. We celebrated Thanksgiving and Christmas there, no longer homeless. It was cramped, but it was independence.

That Thanksgiving, we prepared to go to Wichita to visit my family, and to Joplin, Missouri to visit Carol's family. The house church we had been working on had not come together, so our family had just been meeting together to worship. At the same time, right before we left to spend Thanksgiving with our families, Mike had called me and told me that everyone in his church was moving away. We prayed about our future direction, and decided to close down Simplicity Church at the end of 2011.

While we were back in Wichita, my Dad and I had a conversation. He told me, "Son, no man in our family has ever lived past the age of seventy, and I just don't know if I have a lot of time left." At the

time of this conversation, my Dad was sixty-nine years old and just 2 months from his 70th birthday. I said, "Dad you know, you're under doctor's care, you're in good health, and technology is much better. I don't think you have anything to worry about. You have cousins who have lived into their eighties. You're going to be fine, don't worry about it." I dismissed the conversation after that.

We came back from thanksgiving, having had a great time with family. Mike and Kim had decided to go back to his home town in Texas to visit family, and they asked us if we would house sit for them. Our dog was still there, our cat was still there. The other cat had unfortunately been killed by a neighborhood dog, and so it was a chance for us to reconnect with our animals, and just have a little more space than a studio apartment. One night we were talking about what our ministry needed to look like on Padre Island, and in the middle of that conversation, I heard deep within my spirit, "Go to Wichita, Kansas." We had left Wichita twenty-three years earlier and never intended to return. I began to ask God, "If that's really You, would You affirm that through Carol." I didn't even get that prayer out, and Carol asked, "Do you think the Lord would call us to move to Wichita, or somewhere nearby?" We began to pray about that direction and within a few days the Lord had shown us that we indeed needed to return to Wichita.

The new business we had started had taken off very quickly, and our rent was being covered by it. It seemed very feasible for a move to Wichita and we were excited. Two nights later, the Lord awakened me and told me to go to my Facebook wall. There I found a man who lived in Wichita, named Rodney

Ducroq. I learned that Rodney was from South Africa. He had planted a church in Wichita, and somehow, he had ended up on my Facebook account as a friend. I scheduled a time to talk to him over the phone and as we spoke he began to affirm a lot of things that I had been thinking about Wichita. I had felt that there was a generational gap, and that there was a need to raise up a future generation of leaders there.

I went to check Wichita out in January and I was able to be there for my parents' 46th wedding anniversary. I decided I would return in March to begin looking at options for ministry and housing. When the time came, my dad called me and said, "Don't come up. I've been talking to your mom about the need to get our affairs in order if something should happen to either one of us, and it's really upset her. It's not a good time for you to come." Three weeks later he finally called me back and said, "I think it's okay for you to come up now."

I had trouble finding a house in Wichita. We had a German Shepherd and most landlords wouldn't allow us to keep him on their properties. Landlords that would accept a German Shepherd did not want to wait until June to be paid rent. They didn't want their properties sitting empty for that long. Nothing was coming together and I was distraught. One day, my mom came home and said, "Listen, I drove around the park and there's a house right across from it, have you seen it?" I had been there earlier that day and there had been nothing for rent or for sale, but it turned out that the owner had just put the sign up. I wanted to see the house that day, but the family who owned it said I could only see it the next

day, which was Easter Sunday. I told them I couldn't, as I'd be at church, so they allowed me to see the house that evening. I explained my situation and they were happy to rent the house to us. They required no lease and agreed to rent the house according to my timeframe. God had provided it at just the right time for the right amount of money.

Before I got back home the engine on our van blew up. It ended up being a \$3,000 repair. I no longer had enough money to repair the van, pay for the deposit and rent the new house, as well as pay for the moving truck to relocate. I only had enough money to do two of the three. About that time, I got an email message and it was from the man I had worked for two years earlier. The same man who had terminated Carol's employment when I refused to let him be a part of my ministry. The same man who had hurt me deeply. He said, "I'd like you and Carol to come over. I hear you're leaving town and I'd like to visit with you." As we visited with him he said, "I know that I've hurt you deeply, and I need to ask your forgiveness. I want to be reconciled to you." I shared our story and he said, "I know that you followed what God was telling you to do, and I can see now it was the right thing. I'm sorry for causing you such pain." We were able to reconcile the broken relationship, and it was such a beautiful thing.

We picked up our van a week later, only to have the engine go out, we happened to be right by his house. We called and asked if we could borrow his car. He said, "Not only borrow it, but keep it until your car is out of the shop." For the next six weeks, we had his vehicle. Moving day came and we still didn't know what to do about the finances. We decided to go ahead and make the move, trusting that the Lord was going to provide some way, somehow. We loaded the truck, and I took the dog with me

and headed to Wichita. I secured the house and got settled in.

Carol and the kids were scheduled to move a few days later. The day before they were scheduled to leave, the van still wasn't ready to be picked up. Late that afternoon, the mechanic called and said, "Your van's ready, come and get it." Carol showed up and told him, "Listen, I don't have enough to pay you the remaining \$748 of the bill." Different people had been contributing along the way, so we had been able to knock some of it down. The man was a fellow Christian. He couldn't really afford to do it, but he offered to let Carol to make payments to him: \$100 a week. At that moment, our friend who we'd reconciled with called Carol and said, "Please give the mechanic my credit card number, I want to take care of the remaining balance. You can either consider it a gift or a loan, it's up to you." He paid the remainder of the bill, Carol got our van, and she and the kids loaded it up the next day. They came to Wichita, and we were reunited. That was the end of May of 2012.

Over the summer, we got to spend a lot of time with my parents, but things were very tough. Carol was looking for other jobs, but we realized what the Lord was asking of her was to work from the house, and to be a part of our kids' lives. She did take on a small part-time job for a little while that really didn't pay enough.

Our daughter asked to be home-schooled. Our son began to play football and my dad and I got to have a lot of deep conversations. He got to watch my daughter do synchronized swimming over the summer and he got to see Collin's first high school football games. October 31 of 2012, I was working on

making some marketing videos, and there was a frantic knock on the door. My daughter had gone over to my parents' house two blocks away. My daughter was at the door, out of breath, and her face was red, she says, "Come quickly, come quickly, grandpa's down, and grandma can't get him up!" We jumped in the car, and headed over to my parents' house, arriving just as the ambulance was getting there. I ran through the front door to see the firefighters doing chest compressions on my dad and they had an airbag in his mouth. I looked in his eyes, and I knew he was gone. I was blessed that two days earlier we had celebrated my son's fifteenth birthday and my dad got to be there. It was the last time I saw my dad alive. It was the last time I got to talk to him.

The day he died, he had gone to volunteer at the county emergency operations center. He had been upset because his bank had raised the fee on his safe deposit box. After leaving the operations center, he had gone and cleared out his entire safe deposit box, driven home, set down everything that was in his safe deposit box on the couch, walked downstairs, and died.

When I look at what the Lord had done over that last year, all I could say was, "Thank You." The Lord had allowed my dad and I to have a conversation in November 2011, where he said, "I don't know if I will live a lot longer." In December of 2011, God had said, "You need to move to Wichita." And in May of 2012, God had provided a home two blocks away from my parents. On the day of my dad's death, he had gone to the bank and had gotten all of the things I needed to settle his affairs. He had driven home safely, gone downstairs, and Jesus tapped him on the shoulder and said, "It's time to go." I was there

by my mom's side when the paramedics told her that he was gone. I was there when the funeral home came and got his body. I had the privilege of preaching at my dad's funeral the next week. His sister came to visit him the weekend before he died. When I look at everything that God had done that year before, it was preparing my dad and all of us for his death. I marveled at God's grace – how good He really is.

Shortly before I moved to Wichita, I was still frustrated about my business and how it was struggling. I got another letter from my son Collin, the night I was telling Carol, "Maybe I made a mistake." I came out and in my laptop, was this note. It said, "*Carl, why must you doubt me? Why can't you trust me? Why do you not have the courage I am trying to give you? You complain about having no fruit and not having anything to prove your work, but you were foolish, and you choose not to look at everything I have done for you. Yet you won't accept the little things. You refuse to take anything less than a grand prize. Until you have faith, true faith, without a doubt of what I can do, you shall not see the grand prize. You say you fully believe, but I know you my son. Stop this, I weep for you. But you don't listen, come back my son, enjoy each day, each sale, each sign up. Be grateful for all I have given you.*" The Lord was telling me then, "You have to be true to your business."

It was my business that allowed me to be there when my dad died. It was my business that allowed me to preach at my dad's funeral. It was my business that allowed me to take November off and tend to my dad's affairs. It was my business that would allow me, an only child, to take care of my grieving mother.

A great thing had taken place a couple of months before my Dad died. Rodney, my pastor, had introduced me to another local pastor named Scott. Scott had a heart to start ministry work in Uganda. Scott offered to pay my way to go back to Africa if I would help him to establish some work there. As we finished off my dad's funeral and settling his affairs, I looked forward to January and a return to Africa after 3 years of absence.

In January of 2013 I went to Africa with Scott and Nathanael, a young man who was a part of his church. I introduced them to the people I had been working with in 2009 and 2010. Out of that trip, Scott both Scott and Nathanael began to be stirred for greater work in that region.

As we came into 2013, things were still growing in the business. It was a little tighter than I cared for, but I began to really watch God open more and more doors. I came back from Africa excited, but not knowing where I would really serve in the church we were in; there wasn't really a place for me. We moved into the summer of 2013, and Carol and I realized that it was time for her to leave her job in Corpus Christi behind.

We thought it was time for her to step out in faith with me and we wanted to build the business as a couple. Interestingly enough, we had made a commitment that if things hadn't turned around by the end of the summer of 2013, if we weren't in a better financial place, we were going to consider one of us going back to work. As we got to Labor Day, although the business was doing well, it was not in a place that could support our family and the business itself. I had already sold my wedding ring, most anything

we had left of value and pared our expenses to the bare minimums. In spite of these sacrifices, we were needing to scale out the business, and support our household.

As summer approached, my mom had been struggling with staying in the house I grew up in, so we decided to change houses. We swapped houses in July of 2013. Carol and I continued to work on our business, and began setting up a home in the house that I grew up in. In fact, I now occupy the office that was my dad's office for so many years.

As Labor Day approached, things were really tight and it appeared that I would not be serving as a pastor any further. We didn't even have enough money for gas to go to our small group, and I became distraught again. I said, "Carol, I have got to do something. I need to go get a job." And we both agreed that that was what needed to happen. I began to put my resume' together, and began to send out applications. That night before I got ready to go to bed, my son, who had not even been home, handed me a letter and said "this is for you." This one reads, "*Was Tarshish the answer for Jonah? I provided a shelter and also took it away. Was Hagar the mother of my people? Did the descendants of Ishmael resent those of Israel? Was Moses who had been instructed to speak to the rock and hitting it took away his promised land? Of the twelve scouts, how many saw the Promised Land? Did David back away from the giant? Did Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego bow to the idol so as to escape the fire? Did Noah take part of the ridicule of his neighbors? Did Esther cower at the King's door? Did Joshua give up on the sixth day? No, they persevered amongst ridicule, slavery and death. You are just like Pharaoh, you refuse to*

listen. Are the flies not enough, shall I take the livestock as well? You teach what I have given you, but are unwilling to follow it. Why must you look back at Sodom and Gomorrah when you have been rescued from it? Why beat the donkey when it is you who failed to see the angel? Why must you partake in the apple Eden has been given, but you desire to leave it? The promise land is ready to be taken, but you wish to wait. Ninevah has been saved, but you mope at your success. The son wishes to give you life, but you only want to stay in tune. I have handed you the Canaanites, yet all you see are deadly giants. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for my god is with me. Am I not with you? Have I not conquered death? For I am the God of second chances. Yet punishment awaits for those who hear but refuse to listen.”

Once I read those words, I knew my job search was over. An interesting thing happened the very next day: I received an email from the company we had launched in 2011 and the email was inviting me to stand before an audience of eight hundred other marketers in Dallas on October 19th, 2013, to share my story. The day came for Carol and I to take that stage and share our story. I told of the dream and passion that were deep inside of me and the cost of the journey to see those things birthed. I shared of the mentors and skills that had shaped my current direction in business. When it was over, we found ourselves surrounded by many people. Some asked for prayer. Two women came to me confessing their anger with God over the loss of a child. They wanted to know if God could truly forgive them for that anger. In that moment, God began to show me that I hadn't left the ministry. My ministry was changing. The ministry was a ministry to the marketplace, and it was in the marketplace where I would touch

people's lives with the healing hands of Jesus. It was in the marketplace that I would speak life into those that were dying, it was in the marketplace that I would introduce the love of God into the lives of people who have no hope. It was in the marketplace that I would engage people who would never set foot in any church that I would pastor. This was my ministry. The Lord began to show me that I was serving in his priesthood and it was the work of my hands that would open the relational doors of ministry.

In the fall of 2011, I had recommitted my life to the difficult journey of ministry while attending the Willowcreek Leadership Summit. During one of the sessions I was given a broken shard of pottery and I wrote that commitment out. That day I felt the Lord instructing me to shave my head as a sign of a covenant between myself and Him, to this day my head remains shaved, because of that commitment. He was reminding me that He had called me to be an apostle in his kingdom and that my work would be just like that of the apostle Paul, the tent maker. Someone who touched lives, who started churches, who initiated work through the work of his hands. The Lord reminded me that, as a priest, He is the one who provides for me. He asked me to look around at my car, my clothes, my pajamas, and the very house I live in. He asked me, "Did you acquire any of these things through the work of your own hands?" And I said, "No." He showed me my business, "Are you making lots of money because of the great things you're doing, or the people that have assembled around you?" The answer was no. What the Lord showed me in that moment was that everything I own had been a gift from Him. He reminded me that I need not fret over the things I was not able to accomplish on my own, because He was the one who was providing for me. He also impressed on me that my identity and value had been wrapped up in being a pastor. He was

showing me that I had to be alright, simply being in Him.

After speaking at that event in October of 2013, I anticipated that things in my life would begin to take off. The church I was attending had asked me to pray about being an elder and I felt that the exposure of the event in Dallas would propel my business to new heights. It didn't take long for me to realize that there was still much refinement needed in my life.

When I returned from Dallas, the new pastor of our church informed me that he didn't feel as though I was supposed to serve as part of the elder team. Instead he encouraged me to just "be free." It was his feeling that I just needed come and enjoy the presence of Jesus at church without having to worry about serving. My spirit agonized over those words. I no longer had an overseas ministry, I was no longer preaching, my thoughts of planting another church had come to an end and now I was not even being allowed to serve. What had I done?

As I went through this season, God continued to remind me that I was finding my value in the work of the ministry and not in Him. If I didn't have the title of Pastor, if I wasn't preaching every week, if I wasn't leading I felt as though I had no identity or personal worth. I finally reached a rock bottom place of surrendering my need for "ministry." The prayer was something like this: "Lord, if I never travel overseas again, if I never preach another sermon, if I never have the title of Pastor it is ok. My value and my worth are found in you and you alone. Forgive me for making the ministry and the call on my life an idol. You are all I need."

Shortly after I prayed that prayer, Scott, the pastor who had gone to Africa with me earlier in the year met me for coffee. He had returned to Kenya with a small team over the summer and God had birthed a new dream through that team and in his life. He asked me about things at my current church and I told him that I had been given permission to “be free.” Scott told me about the things that were on his heart and told me that there was a place for me in the ministry work of his church, if I felt God leading me that way. Within a few days, I felt confirmation of God’s leading and shared with the church leadership team at my church what I was feeling. The leadership team agreed and released me to move on in this new direction. The next Sunday we began attending Scott’s church.

As we entered into 2014, things became increasingly difficult financially. The network marketing company I had been building began making numerous changes after the Dallas event. Those changes proved detrimental to my business and it came to a complete stop. Carol took on a part-time job to help make ends meet, but her heart wasn’t in the business. We fought often over money and my perceived lack of effort on her part. My mom and others were having to help us with what few bills we had and I could quickly see myself becoming homeless again.

We continued to struggle on financially through the early part of the year, but managed to make it, although our relationship was deteriorating with the financial pressure. During this time, God gave us a glimpse of our future. My wife began meeting local business people at networking events and several of them asked if we would be willing to do the internet marketing for their companies? At the same time I

made trips to Africa and returned to India for the first time in 5 years that year.

Scott could see the financial pressures we were under and he continually challenged me that he needed my business to work, if I was going to play an active part in the missions work in Africa and India. He also began counseling my wife and I, helping us unpack the wounds and baggage of our journey. It was through these sessions that God revealed to me that I had forfeited my leadership in key areas of my home. I had allowed the pain of my experiences in Corpus Christi to put me into retreat. I made decisions during that season that shifted the hard, painful work to my wife so I could have shelter. To put it bluntly, I had chosen to be a coward, expecting my wife to fight the battles and change our circumstances. I had to repent. I had abdicated my God given responsibilities and I had asked my wife to become something she didn't want to be. I also realized that early in our marriage I had forced her to give up her dreams and once again found myself asking for forgiveness. There was about a 3 week period, where God continued to flush out the places I had harmed my wife through indifference and cowardice. It was in these times of repentance and forgiveness that many wounds that neither of us realized were there, were finally healed.

We also realized things had to change. My wife had not wanted to disappoint me, so she was trying to do things that were not her gifting and she was miserable. I knew that we had to go back to our strengths. Carol began taking on new bookkeeping clients. This had been the work of her hands for many years and she loved it. I began seeking out consulting clients and quickly saw a solid customer base

forming under my feet.

2014 saw God opening some new doors to me that were unexpected. In late 2013, I had been out in Las Vegas for a marketing conference. I was introduced to a well-known personal development speaker who offered a conference the following week at no cost to 20 of the attendees of my conference. I acted quickly and was part of that group of 20 people. The following week, Carol and I spent 3 days in his seminar and I found myself inspired in ways that were both exciting and frightening to me. I quickly realized it would take more faith to live out the dream within my heart than it actually did to survive being homeless. In June of 2014, this man invited me to spend a weekend at his mansion with 9 other high level entrepreneurs. Two of those participating were real estate investors, something I had an interest in, but had never pursued due to a lack of money. One of these investors was a trainer on the national real estate circuit and wanted someone to teach marketing at his events. I offered to trade services with him. I would do his marketing if he would teach me real estate and he agreed.

On the ministry front, God began to restore the things that he asked me to surrender. Scott had encouraged me to stay in my sweet spot. My real passions are teaching, mentoring and overseas pastoral training. He encouraged me that I had fought my ministry battles and that I didn't need to repeat those experiences. Taking his advice, I began leading a small group and then started teaching on Wednesday nights. By the end of the year, I was teaching every Wednesday night and writing the small group discussion material for our groups. Being active in local church ministry once again was a fresh wind in

my sails.

Late in 2014, I took the real estate training I had been given and bought our first two investment properties. This was an avenue of ministry funding I had dreamed of for many years and now I was seeing God bring it about in my life. The changes we had made to our overall business structure at the beginning of the year was paying off as well. We were not struggling to pay bills and there was enough money to run both the business and the household at the same time. Although there wasn't much extra, we were truly making it and getting a solid foundation under our feet once again.

2015 is what I would term the year of restoration. In 2015, we were able to generate revenue equivalent to the last salary I had earned in Corpus Christi 7 years earlier. Scott approached me and asked if I would be willing to once again serve in a pastoral position in the church as the Small Groups Pastor. I made 4 trips overseas that year, strengthening the relationships I had been forging since 2006 and developing new ones. During the year, we also purchased 3 more investment properties. It was during 2015 that I watched God restore my ministry, my finances, my marriage, our first family vacation in 8 years and so many other things in my life. All of them had been put on the altar and in some way, all of them had been taken away. Now I was witnessing the return of these things, but with a new perspective, new drive and new appreciation for God's refining process.

As we begin 2017, I now have my ministry – in some ways, the ministry that I've always yearned for and in some ways so much bigger than anything I ever envisioned – one that allows me to travel the

world and spread the message of Jesus Christ multiple times a year and in multiple places. Currently Scott and I spend nearly 2 months out of the year ministering to over 400 pastors in 8 countries throughout East Africa and India. Additionally, I have a business that goes with me wherever I go and continues to grow. I have been able to fund other ministries and support other ministers through my companies. I am truly amazed by all God has done in my life, not because I deserved it, but because His love for me is overwhelming.

If you remember nothing else from this book remember this. The journey all began with the word, "yes." The reason I'm telling this story is because many people have told me it's a story that has to be told. "God is taking you through these experiences so you can strengthen others, so you can challenge others, so that they can truly trust God." Ultimately, the question that was posed to me through all of these life experiences was: "Carl, do you really believe what you teach? Are you willing to walk out the things you say you believe?" Jesus was saying, "You can trust Me with eternity, but can you trust Me with your life, with your family, with your finances?"

You know, in my time as a homeless man, I got to travel the world not knowing how I would do it. In my time as a homeless man, I built a business without having any resources. In my time as a homeless man, I had an atheist who supported my ministry. I've seen God do the miraculous over and over again. I know that God wants to do amazing things in our world today, and He's looking for men and women who will simply say, "yes," and who will allow Him to take them into their greatest fears, so

they can become unbreakable. On the backside of these things that I've shared with you is that understanding. I'm not afraid to lose my home anymore, I've already been there. I'm not afraid to lose loved ones anymore, I've already been there. I'm not afraid to lose all of my money, I've already been there. I'm not afraid to lose status, and credibility and recognition and fame, I've already been there. I'm not afraid to lose businesses, I've already been there. You see, these are the things in the past that would have caused me to hesitate, that would have caused me to say "no" to God. God had to take me into my deepest fears so I could truly be a "yes" man. A man who says, "Yes – wherever You lead, I will go. I will trust You with everything I am and everything that I have." Because of that, I've watched God use me in ways I could never imagine. And I know that He will use you in the same way.

Don't let your fears overtake you, your God is much bigger than the things you fear. He is much bigger than the things that keep you awake at night. If you will truly trust Him with everything, He will do things in your life you could never imagine. The things you read about in the book of Acts. The things you read about in the miracles of Jesus, being done through your hands.

I want to finish with this one story:

In 2006 I made my first trip to India. I was asked to pray for people. I didn't even know how God would use me, or heal people through me. In fact, my prayer that trip, when I would lay hands on people, was this, "God, my hands are Your hands, You do what You want to do through my hands, in

Jesus name." In 2009, as I preached at an outdoor meeting, a woman stood up. She pointed to me and said, "In 2006, that man prayed for me. I was blind in both eyes. Immediately, when he laid his hands on me, I was able to see with one eye. Within a week, my other eye had so improved that they were able to do surgery on it, and I now see through both eyes clearly as the first time I ever looked upon his face." In that moment, the Lord showed me that "even when you didn't believe, even when you didn't understand, even when you didn't know, I was using you." That's what I want to say to you today.

Don't underestimate what God wants to do with you. Don't base His abilities on your competencies. God is not looking for people because of their ability, He's looking for people because of their availability. Today I also want to invite you. If you don't know Jesus, my Lord and Savior, as your Lord and Savior – He wants to do something amazing in your life, if you will give all of your life to Him. He will do a life on life exchange, He will give you all of His righteousness – the very power and presence of God will indwell you and fill your life, and you will do amazing things in this world. That's what I want to leave you with.

Thank you for taking the time to share my journey. I look forward to sharing with you more in the days to come.

Be blessed.