

A PERSONAL TESTIMONY

By MARK P. BISHOP, M.D.

My life's goal is to exhaust my human potential in the service to my fellow man. I developed this mission statement during the process of my application to medical school. This continues to be my mission statement and did in fact originate early in my life. As a young boy I accompanied my dad on the house calls he made as a family physician. I sat in the car as my dad tended to the sick and dying. There was always someone anxiously waiting at the door as we drove up to the house. After my dad was ushered inside the house, someone usually came out to the car to invite me inside.

The scene was pretty much the same every time. My dad was bent over or sitting on the edge of the couch or bed talking to or examining the afflicted person. Family members usually gathered in silent support of their loved ones. Their concern and worry was evidenced by the expression of anxiety and distress I saw in their eyes. Their worry, and often times their sorrow was punctuated by the stream of tears I noticed trickling down their cheeks.

Following my dad's assessment of the ill person, he would offer his hand for a handshake, or if the patient could not shake hands, he would reach out and touch the person with a pat on the head or shoulder, or on

the back of their hand. Then he always offered some type of encouragement. A reassuring comment, such as “Everything is going to be okay”, or “If you need anything don’t hesitate to give me a call”. No matter what he said or did, I could tell that his care and caring were a great comfort to his patients as well as to their families and loved ones. As a third grader I could see that my dad’s life as a physician really made a difference in the lives of others. I simply wanted my life’s work to be as meaningful.

As it turned out, I found myself a million miles away from my goal of becoming a physician. I had trouble in school from the start. I never learned to comprehend what I read. Every year through grade school, my teachers would meet with my parents and discuss my failures in schoolwork. There was always that suggestion to hold me back a year. I never did get held back, but graduated from high school in the bottom 25% of my class. My guidance counselor advised me against going to college. He predicted that I would be frustrated and not be able to make the grade. Considering my past performance, I had given him every reason to draw those conclusions.

I don’t know why, but I had an inner feeling that if there was a God in Heaven He would provide the ways and means for a willing heart to serve His creation. I knew I had the willing heart, but I had also drifted

a long way from God. My parents saw to it that as youngsters my brothers and I attended Sunday School and church. When we reached high school age, my dad gave us the option of choosing for ourselves if we were to be involved with church. Dad allowed us to exercise our own free will in this matter. As it turned out, even though I chose to abandon church, this freedom of choice was one of my greatest blessings. Nothing was forced upon me, which led to few, if any, preconceived ideas about my position with God.

During those early years of my growing up, we lived in Haynesville, Louisiana. After dad's internship at the University of Texas in Galveston, he did not have enough money to get back to Wisconsin, so he initially moved to this small southern town to work a year to earn enough money to move back to Wisconsin. Mom started having more babies and the people in the town were so loving and gracious toward us all, we stayed for nine years. During that time, we had a maid who was a black woman named Elva Washington. Elva called herself our "brown mama". Coming from their own humble backgrounds my parents were "color blind". Elva was treated as one of the family and actually lived with us, went on vacations with us, but most importantly was God's ever present influence in our home. Elva had a Pentecostal background. The kind of Christians we all called "holy rollers". Every time dad or one of us kids swore or did

or said anything disrespectful toward God, she would rush over to us, put one hand over our heads, raise the other hand and shout, "Save him Jesus, Save him Jesus"! As she vocalized her request she would jerk her neck and back as if she had been electrocuted. This went on for years! All of us kids would laugh and make fun of her, but it never deterred her commitment to have Jesus save us.

I went on to college with every fear in the world that I would fail. When the students on my dorm floor had their pictures taken for the school annual, I skipped out. I thought there was no way I was going to appear as part of this school, only to flunk out. I didn't want anyone to look back in the annual and see me as a failure.

Well, I tackled college with all my might. I studied and worked untold hours to accomplish my goal. I was slowly but surely teaching my brain how to learn, think and reason. I was never off of the Dean's list of academic honors. I marched forward with complete willful devotion, dedication and commitment to school. All along the way I could hardly believe my own success. No one else could either--even my family was dumbfounded to explain my new found academic success.

Then in my junior year, as I was applying to medical school, I came up against the end of my own ability. Second semester physics had forced me to my knees.

Any grade below a B in a five credit science course would end my aspirations of getting into medical school. We had had three hourly exams during the semester, all of which I had failed. I couldn't believe it! Ironically, at the same time I was taking second semester organic chemistry and had just been honored by my professor for having the highest grade average for the semester in a class of over 300 students. He exempted me from taking the final exam. He read my name out of his grade book and asked me to stand before my class. As I rose out of my chair, the auditorium broke out in applause and a standing ovation ensued from my classmates. All of this however did not bail me out of my physics dilemma. But boy, did I need this kind of reinforcement in the midst of my failure in physics. On the last day of physics class our professor made the announcement that if our grade on the final exam was better than the sum total of the previous three exams, he would drop all three exams and accept the final exam as the final grade. Yes!--count only the grade on our final exam and throw the other three exam grades out! I thought, Oh boy! A second chance to wipe away those failing grades. With the exemption from the organic chemistry final, I saw extra time that I could spend studying for physics. After launching into my marathon study of physics, I had totally and completely reviewed the entire semester's work. That night before the final exam, at 1 a.m., I sat

at my desk with all of my notes, textbooks, programmed study guides and self-help manuals in physics sitting before me. I took a final inventory of all that material, because I wanted to make sure I had covered every possible factor that would help ensure my success. Not only was my final physics grade in the balance, but also my very acceptance to medical school. As my visual and mental inventory proceeded from one study aid and guide to another, I came to an assurance that I had done everything humanly possible to ensure my success. At that point, I leaned back in my chair and looked up toward the ceiling. For the first time in years it dawned on me that just maybe, if there was a God looking over the affairs of the universe, the world, and people, I had better enlist His help! It struck me at that moment that I had literally come to the end of myself. I had truly exhausted my own capabilities, only to be met by failure in this particular circumstance. For the first time in my academic success, my physics failure forced me to look outside of myself. I was forced to consider help from someone or something bigger and greater than myself. I literally asked God to help me out of this dilemma. Well, actually I *begged* and *pleaded* for His intervention on my behalf. I fully realized that I deserved absolutely nothing from God, but I was desperate. As I bartered with God for His intervention, I committed my life's work as a physician to His honor and glory if He could

find a way to help me in the physics final, and to clear the way for my entrance into medical school.

Well, I breezed through the physics final with a solid B and was admitted to medical school in the first round of applicants. I must admit that I quickly forgot God's intervention on my part. Instead, I took the credit for my success, based on my diligence, work and effort. I proceeded through medical school with continued academic excellence and honors. I quickly became known by my classmates as the most highly motivated, hardest working student in my class. These efforts led to my induction into Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Medical Society. AOA membership is the highest academic honor given in medicine. This honor had a special meaning for me since my dad had also been an AOA medical student.

Following medical school, I completed a three year family practice residency. I then fulfilled my childhood dream of joining my dad in medical practice. After all, some of my personal motivation to succeed in medicine was based on earning his and my mother's love and approval. When I returned to practice with him, I was assured not only of their approval, but also of their love. At the time, I thought there was no higher level of human accomplishment or success than having chased a childhood dream to success, while at the same time having the assurance of one's own parent's love and approval.

After about two years in medical practice I began to feel a sense of personal distress and incompleteness. At the same time I had uncovered a **human condition**, the likes of which I had never recognized nor encountered in my entire medical career. I was almost in a state of disbelief! Considering I had only recently completed a phenomenal education, which included being taught by two Nobel Prize winning scientists, how could I have missed this **human predicament**.

Dr. Goban Korana who won the Nobel Prize for synthesizing the first human gene had been a genetics and molecular biology professor of mine. One of my medical school professors, Dr. Jack Temin, won the Nobel Prize in medicine for discovering the enzyme enabling viruses to reproduce in the human body. It happens to be the enzyme that the Aids virus uses to grow inside human cells. Having been taught by these brilliant scientists, I thought I had mastered the study of the human body. I had delved into and consumed the knowledge of each and every system and organ of the human body.

I studied the body from the skin to the inner most depths of each organ system, even down to the ultra-structure of the human cell as revealed by the electron microscope. And in even greater detail, I had been fortunate enough to be a part of the literal explosion in knowledge regarding the molecular biology of the

human cell. But nowhere had I seen, heard or learned about the **nature of man** which I had recently uncovered in my medical practice. After the fractures were treated, babies were delivered, heart attacks healed, and pneumonias cleared, I found in my fellow man a state of discontent; a lack of love, a lack of forgiveness, and a lack of meaning and purpose. These conditions involve matters of the **human spirit**. I had not recognized this aspect of the anatomy of humans until I was granted entrance into people's inner being--the core issues of their lives--the matters of their spirits. I had come to recognize that what our society and what the medical and social sciences viewed as diseases, such as delinquency, alcoholism, drug addiction, divorce, depression, violence, suicide, and unhappiness were all symptoms of a more fundamental underlying set of conditions.

At the heart of all of these psychological and social ills I found a **spiritual condition** based on anger, jealousy, resentment, guilt, shame, selfishness, dishonesty, and disrespect for self and others. The presence of these **natural** characteristics seemed to destroy people by dominating the basis of their interpersonal relationships. The very relationships that I thought were supposed to be the joyful core of human existence seemed instead to be the core of human destruction. People's lives were being ruined by relationships with the closest members

of their families. Husbands against wives, fathers against their sons, mothers against their daughters, and brothers against their sisters. There seemed to be no end to the way these emotions caused the destruction of people's lives. I thought to myself: "What in the world is going on here?" Humans, the most highly sophisticated form of life on planet earth are destroying themselves on the basis of disordered, interpersonal relationships based on anger, jealousy, resentment, shame, guilt, lack of forgiveness, hostility, and selfishness. I had not come up against the likes of these conditions and problems in the entirety of my medical education. I had almost concluded that mankind had reached a level of development with regards to his mind and emotions that doomed him for a life devoid of love, forgiveness and meaning. The most destructive of these by far being the absence of love. I had missed the fact that people have a **natural spiritual condition** that leads to destruction and death, if unopposed by a spiritual sense of love, forgiveness and meaning.

While working in the Emergency Room one evening, the nurse called to tell me that Pastor Steve, a local pastor, would like to speak with me. Little did I know that Pastor Steve and his wife, Becky had been in prayer for me and my own salvation. I had hopefully seen my last patient in the Emergency Room that evening, so, I somewhat reluctantly asked her to send Pastor Steve back to

the Emergency Room. Also remember, I had not been in church for fifteen years. All things considered, I was not too anxious to hear a sermon, especially after working all day and half the night. I was also tired and hungry. But mostly, I was perplexed and haunted by the thought that despite all of my efforts toward caring for my fellow man, in the end, life is devoid of the joy of love, the peace of forgiveness and the meaning of life's purpose: the most important of these being the joy of love. Pastor Steve must have sensed my thoughts of futility regarding life. After a few, somewhat awkward general statements, I shared with Pastor Steve my observations about the great dilemma and predicament of the **human condition**. I had concluded in my own mind that if a solution existed for these great deficiencies in life, it would have to meet certain biological criteria, since it is needed by all humans. I reasoned that like oxygen which is universally needed for humans' biological and physical life, the solution to this dilemma of humans' spiritual life would have to be: #1. Universally available, #2. Simple to understand, #3. Easily accessible to all--free! I shared these factors with Pastor Steve, which I assumed would immediately stonewall any attempt on his part to preach to me. To my utter amazement, Pastor Steve immediately retorted with his conclusion, "There is a solution to our **spiritual condition** that satisfies all of these criteria."

I immediately expressed my skepticism by asking, "What do you mean?" Pastor Steve pulled out his little pocket Bible and quoted:

1 John 4:8; "God is love."

The simplicity of his answer almost left me speechless. In my mind I quickly surveyed my construction of the human organism and realized that I had not considered man to have a need for God. Before that moment I did not know I had a need for God. Except of course for those rare desperate moments of personal need and weakness like converting an "F" in physics to a "B". But what struck me like a bolt of lightning was when Pastor Steve told me that not only is God Love but that **God loves me!** I immediately thought, "Why in the world would God love me?" After all, I had willfully and wantingly rejected God! But Pastor Steve said, "That didn't matter! God loves us just the way we are and just for who we are - one of His children!" Boy, did that feel good! But in my skepticism I needed more evidence or a more concrete definition of this God and of His love. I had not realized how much I needed God or His love in my life to live a fulfilling life, until Pastor Steve defended his assertions by reading the definition of love from the Bible.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7: "Love is very patient and kind, never jealous or envious, never boastful or proud, never haughty or selfish or rude. Love does not demand its own way. It is not irritable or touchy. It does not hold grudges and will hardly even notice when others do it wrong. It is never glad about injustice, but rejoices whenever truth wins out. If you love someone you will be loyal to him no matter what the cost. You will always believe in him, always expect the best of him, and always stand your ground in defending him."

I was convinced!

Time and time again I heard people confess that these were the very qualities that were missing in their lives. When I heard them, I realized they were also missing in my own. The absence of which causes our greatest heartaches and sorrows. How could I have overlooked the essence of life, the fulfillment of our spiritual needs and the cure for our **spiritual condition**. Mankind and me need God in order to relate with love rather than our nature of anger, resentment, jealousy, envy, selfishness and hostility. I was astonished! In response I said to Pastor Steve, "I'll be damned!" He said, "Mark, yes you will."

You see, I had never heard that God is love. My concept of God was that He is the judge, jury and chief law enforcement officer of the universe and in the affairs of man. I quickly retorted to Pastor Steve, "I thought God came to condemn man!" He said, "No!"

John 3: 16-17; "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that anyone who believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. God did not send His Son into the world to condemn it, but to save it."

I again blurted out, "I'll be damned!" Pastor Steve somewhat offended fired back, "Yes you will!" I said, "But Pastor Steve, we are destined toward self destruction as a result of our disordered interpersonal relationships. How does an abstract God enter into and affect the very core of our personal relationships?" Pastor Steve said, "We do not have an abstract God. We have a personal God who saw the plight and **self destructive nature** of mankind. He created us in His *Spiritual image* so He could love us and we in turn could love Him. When this loving relationship is established, we then become capable of loving ourselves and others. God did not create us to condemn us or allow us to condemn ourselves. He came to save us in the simplest way possible. He came to us in the form of a living human being--in the form of His Son, Jesus."

God's plan has always been to develop a relationship with us as His creation. So He came to us in a form that we can easily understand and accept, in the form of ourselves as a human being. It is through our relationship with Jesus that we come to know God.

Colossians 1-15; "Christ is the exact likeness of the unseen God."

Pastor Steve went on to explain that when we see Christ, we also see all of God. Christ came to us to give us a living demonstration of love in action demonstrated by His life. The essence of Christianity is not the ritual of religion, but our relationship with Christ.

I had concluded from my observations that our **human nature** is passed on to us as individuals by our human families. Since the formation place of our human interpersonal relationships is in our families, and there are no perfect human families, we are doomed to repetitively make the same mistakes generation after generation as our families have. But, with God, this is not so! Christ came to rescue us from our predicaments!

Peter 1: 1-3; "For it is His boundless mercy that has given us the privilege of being born again so that we are now members of God's own family. Through our relationship with God through Christ, we are adopted into His family, which is right, true, correct and perfect."

Ephesians 1:5; "His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into His own family by sending Jesus Christ to die for us, and He did this because he wanted to!"

It all began to make sense as Pastor Steve continued to explain God's plan for man, and for me. Rather than be destroyed by my interpersonal relationships which are passed on to me by the **natural** patterns and processes of **humans' nature**, God gives me the opportunity to become adopted into His family and to be guided by His *perfect nature*. As a result, I become capable of changing my **human nature** into His *Godly nature*. Only *God's Nature* of love is the source of truly perfect unconditional love.

I then asked Pastor Steve, "Well, what about the **destructive nature** of the lack of forgiveness which I had observed as a universal predicament for people?" He commented, "God knew that we as humans would all need a mechanism to resolve our sin and guilt through forgiveness."

Romans 3: 10-13; "As the scripture says, no one is good- no one in all the world is innocent. No one has ever really followed God's paths, or even truly wanted to. Everyone has turned away and all have gone wrong. No one anywhere has kept on doing what is right, no one."

Romans 3:23; "Yes, all have sinned. All fall short of God's glorious ideal; yet now God declares us not guilty of offending Him if we trust in Jesus Christ, who in His kindness freely takes away our sins."

God sent Christ Jesus to take the punishment for our sins and to end all of God's anger against us. God used Christ's blood and our faith as the means of saving us from His wrath and from ourselves - from our **own nature**.

Romans 3:28; "So it is that we are saved, by faith in Christ and not by the good things we do."

So here is the solution to our **predicament** for guilt and the lack of forgiveness. God allowed the sacrifice of His own Son through Crucifixion to serve as the mechanism for the forgiveness of our sins. All we need to do as humans, is have faith and believe that Christ is the Son of the living God and that He died on the cross for our own individual personal sins. If we as humans and as persons accept this fact by faith, in God's eyes we are forgiven instantly! Just as our ability to love follows our personal realization of God's love, our ability to forgive follows our personal realization of God's forgiveness.

For a third time my amazement of the application of this simple plan for human life was uncontainable. Yes, I unknowingly blurted out again "Well, I'll be damned." This time when Pastor Steve said "Yes you will," after which I finally realized my true condition without Christ was just that - Damned!

I asked Pastor Steve, "Since we all seem to have it, where is the origin in history of our **sinful nature**?" He quoted:

Romans 5:12; "When Adam sinned, sin entered the entire human race. His sin spread death throughout all the world, so everything began to grow old and die, for all sinned."

My **nature of sin** is not dependent upon or passed on to me by my own family. My **sinful nature** existed long before the existence of my family. I am judged to be a sinner merely and simply because I am a human, a descendant of Adam. But what a glorious triumph I am given over this **sinful nature**.

Romans 5: 15-19; "What a contrast between Adam and Christ who was to come! But what a difference between man's sin and God's forgiveness! For this one man, Adam, brought death to many through his sin. But this one man, Jesus Christ, brought forgiveness to many through God's mercy. Adam's one sin brought the penalty of death to many, while Christ freely takes away many sins and gives glorious life instead. The sin of this one man, Adam, caused death to be king over all. But all who will take God's gift of forgiveness and acquittal are kings of life, because of this one man, Jesus Christ. Yes, Adam's sin brought punishment to all, but Christ's righteousness makes men right with God so they can live.

Adam caused many to be sinners because he disobeyed God, and Christ caused many to be made acceptable to God because he obeyed."

Our position of right standing with God is merely based on His free gift of salvation through our faith and belief in His Son.

Next, I asked Pastor Steve, "What is the ultimate meaning, purpose and reward for discovering these gifts and accepting these fundamental truths?" All I had seen as a physician, was that each individual person from their time of conception is on a course to their death. In all honesty and in all sincerity I concluded: we are born, we struggle, we toil, we delight in our successes, we take sorrow in our defeats, and finally our lives make an impact of some kind on others and this world. But in the end, we all die! There just has to be more to life than meets the eye. I confided in Pastor Steve that I could see with the offering of love and forgiveness, man's life on earth is made much more joyous and peaceful. But I knew there just had to be more meaning and purpose to life than simply living and dying. Pastor Steve quickly retorted that the ultimate prize to be obtained through salvation is life eternal. He went on to explain that after the death of Christ, God's plan was far from being concluded. After His death, Christ was resurrected from the dead and ascended to Heaven to spend

eternity with His Father. Pastor Steve explained that this is the last great promise that a Christian has in order to give meaning and purpose to life. The most important function in our earthly and physical lives is that of coming to accept Christ and thereby gaining eternal life.

John 6: 38-40; "For I have come from heaven to do the will of God who sent Me, not to have My own way. And this is the will of God, that I should not lose even one of all those He has given me, but that I should raise them to eternal life at the last day. For it is My Father's will that everyone who sees His Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life--that I should raise Him at the last day."

So it was with Christ at His resurrection, it will also be with those who receive Him as their Savior. They will be raised and resurrected to eternal life in Heaven.

John 14:1-2; "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you."

The whole plan was beginning to make a whole lot of sense to me. Yes, there is some meaning and purpose to this physical life, but when you compare our temporal

life with eternal life, there is no real comparison. Eternity is a long time. It is forever! I thought that anyone who refused an opportunity for eternal life must have taken a complete leave of their senses. Just at that moment, Pastor Steve asked me if I wanted to receive Christ as my Savior. After stuttering and stumbling around for a bit, I conceded that as he had pointed out, I was damned. I knew I simply needed to be saved from the damnation of my own **sinful nature** and my own sins.

Now, the fulfillment of love, forgiveness, meaning and purpose in life certainly sounded obtainable and true to the plan of a truly loving Creator. But in an instant it also sounded to me as though God was revisiting me, holding me to my promise that I made to Him before my physics final and before my admission to medical school. I had immediate and instant recall of my bargain, my bartering, and my pledge to God of becoming a Christian physician and devoting my medical practice to His glory. Could this be God's way of calling me to action by reminding me of my previously made commitments to Him. In consideration of that reality, I gave Pastor Steve a "Yes!" and stated, "I want to ask Christ into my life, and become a Christian." We proceeded to our knees with bowed heads and Pastor Steve asked me to recite the Sinner's Prayer.

"Dear Heavenly Father, I need your help in my life. I am a sinner and need your love and forgiveness. I ask for and receive your Son Jesus into my life as my Savior and as my Lord. Thank you for your love, your forgiveness and for eternal life. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen."

After saying the Sinner's Prayer with an open heart and mind and a genuine assertion of my faith, the realm of humanity's soul and spirit began to reveal itself more fully to me. I was confident that I had just experienced the great equalizer in life, the fulfillment of my own spiritual need. I had been enlightened to the bond that ties all humanity together, that universal need to have a relationship with God. I had just begun to experience the reality of unconditional love! Indeed, God's plan for our spiritual needs complied with the basic criteria which applies to our biological physical need for oxygen. It is: #1. Universally available, #2. It is simple, and #3. It is free. Christ is our "Spiritual Oxygen".

Colossians 3:11; "In this new life one's nationality or race or education or social position is unimportant; such things mean nothing. Whether a person has Christ is what matters, and He is equally available to all."

After that night in the Emergency Room, Pastor Steve encouraged me to buy a Bible. Confessing my reading

difficulty to Pastor Steve, I asked him to recommend “a second grade reader type of Bible”. Not wanting to miss the simplicity of the fundamentals, I actually started with a children’s Bible. My faith in allowing the wisdom of the Bible to guide my own affairs as well as guide the affairs and the lives of others in my care was immediately affirmed by the following:

11 Timothy 3: 16-17; “The whole Bible was given to us by inspiration from God -and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives; it straightens us out and helps us do what is right. It is God’s way of making us well prepared at every point, fully equipped to do good to everyone.”

I have rarely found a person in life who is not searching for what is true, what is right, what is wrong, and pursuing a way of straightening out that which needs correction. There is a basic desire in the heart of all people to do good to others. The study of God’s word leads us into wisdom and knowledge about our lives. I have had numerous encounters which have reaffirmed my simple faith in God’s plan of salvation.

Within two weeks of my own salvation, I was already beginning to doubt my own conclusions about the power and application of God’s plan for the human living circumstance although reasonable

God's whole scheme of love, forgiveness and eternity based only on simple faith, was so far away from my **natural** analytical way of thinking, I asked God for more evidence of His presence, power and application of his plan to daily life. Soon after, I attended a patient admitted to the Emergency Room who was a wayward, vile, vulgar all imposing character. He was six feet three inches tall, long stringy matted hair, rotten snagged teeth, tatoos covered muscular arms and huge dirty hands. He smelled like a mixture of body odor, alcohol and tobacco. His clothes were ripped, torn and filthy. His name was Tom. I called him Tom Cat. He was brought in by the police in a drunken stupor. After I treated his bruised and scraped up body, I thought of his **spiritual condition**. Of all the people I had come across, old Tom Cat was so far away from God, I thought there was no hope for him. I honestly thought it would be a total waste of time to talk to Tom Cat about God. After all, I didn't think a guy that far gone would ever be open to the idea of even looking for God. So, I asked the County Sheriff to haul him off to jail. I nearly fainted as he was entering the officer's car, he looked back at me and pointed his finger at me saying, "If you don't help me, who will?" His comment stopped me dead in my tracks. Instantly I honestly considered this unexpected event as an intervention by God in order to present an opportunity for me to see more evidence of God's

presence, power and plan I had asked for. Tom Cat was too far down the road of self-destruction to be saved by human intervention. Only the power and presence of God's plan could possibly save old Tom Cat. I immediately changed my course of action and admitted him to the hospital. Could Tom be changed??

During his hospitalization he went through the medical complications of alcohol and drug withdrawal. Our Social Services Department discovered that he was a drug addict, an alcoholic, a criminal convicted of attempted murder for which he had served 18 years in prison, and was a male prostitute. I thought to myself, what a gift and a challenge to be given the opportunity to reduce Tom Cat to the simplest terms of human thought and actions in order to find his motivating force in life. Of all the people I had seen, he was destroying himself in every way on every front of his life: physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. After he came out of his drunken stupor, I sat at his bedside probing him, despite his repeated attempts to sidetrack me with his vile and vulgar stories, to discover what made him tick. I had often been self critical that I may have been projecting my own personal needs onto others, and therefore falsely concluding that their needs were similar to mine. After I had broken through his outer shell, he confessed that his lifestyle was "...rotting his brains out". Then I simply stated, "Tom Cat, if

you had three minutes to live, what would you have to accomplish in those last three minutes so that when you died, you would die a fulfilled and satisfied person?" He instantly buried his head in his hands and began to weep and sob. Through the guile of his facade and his despicable life of vulgarity he looked at me through tears and stated that he would need to go home and have his parents put their arms around him and tell him that they loved him. At first, I was surprised by the simplicity of his answer. Then I realized that as anti-social and self-destructive as his life had been, his underlying motive in life was absolutely no different than mine. His life had been directed and motivated by the need for love. Tom Cat's life of crime and anti-social behavior originated in his attempt to gain his dad's approval and love. You see, Tom's dad before him had lived a life of crime and antisocial behavior! He became what his dad was in an attempt to gain his love. Tom Cat was no different than me! I found myself bound to Tom Cat by the commonality of creation and the commonality of fundamental human needs. I also found myself deeply grateful to God for giving me the family He blessed me with, and for guiding and directing my life as He had done. Most profoundly I realized that He, not I, was ultimately responsible for my personal accomplishments.

I shared with Tom Cat that as desirable as it might be, the vacuum in his heart and life could not be filled by parental love alone. For indeed, I had accomplished that and still had the need for deeper meaning and purpose. I shared God's plan of salvation with Tom Cat and he knelt at his bedside as he recited the Sinner's Prayer as I had done. I must confess that I was skeptical about the authenticity of Tom's conversion, even though he actually looked and sounded like a *new person*. But after his discharge from the hospital, he sent me the money I had loaned him for a bus ticket to his parents' home. In his **natural state**, I am convinced that he would not have been true to his promise to repay me. Despite my attempts to locate him I never heard from Tom again, nor did any of the social service agencies who knew him all too well. But, since I asked God for a sign of his transforming power in Tom's life, I will always consider Tom's repayment of his debt as a sign of the regeneration of his heart and an affirmation of God's power and his presence in our daily affairs of life. Once again, I asked and I received!

I knew that accepting Christ was the only thing that could help Tom Cat. It was the only thing that could help me. No one is too good or too bad to be beyond the need for Christ. You see, the **nature of man's spirit without Christ is self-destruction.**

Mark 7: 21-25 "For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts of lust, theft, murder, adultery, wanting what belongs to others, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, pride, and all other folly. All these vile things come from within; they are what pollute you and make you unfit for God."

All of these vile things come from the inner person. They are the result of anger, resentment, jealousy, guilt, and shame. I know of no other way to change the heart of man, Tom Cat or me, than to accept and be filled with the love of God through Christ. I had long since discovered that there is no drug, therapy or surgery that can change the heart of man--only God! This regeneration of the human heart and Spirit was promised to us and foretold long ago;

Ezekiel 36:26-27; "And I will give you a new heart--I will give you new and right desires--and put a new spirit within you. I will take out your stony hearts of sin and give you new hearts of love. And I will put My spirit within you so that you will obey My laws and do what I command."

Our **human nature** and human heart can only be changed when the *Spirit of God* indwells us. When we ask and receive Christ into our lives, we are imparted and indwelt with *God's Holy Spirit*. At this point our **human nature** becomes changed and tempered by the

presence of *God's nature* contained in His *indwelling Spirit*. Old Tom Cat did leave my care a changed man, a *new man*. But, through no power of my own. He received a *new life* from God. As the Bible says;

2 Corinthians 5:17; "When someone becomes a Christian, he becomes a brand new person inside. He is not the same anymore. A new life has begun!"

Imagine that I give you a diagnosis of pneumonia. I give you a prescription for Penicillin pills to be taken for your pneumonia. Penicillin is known to be 100% successful in curing your particular type of pneumonia. In order to cure your pneumonia and become well requires active participation on your part. You are not only required to take the prescription to the pharmacy in order to obtain your Penicillin pills, you must also actively and willfully take into yourself the Penicillin.

In a similar way, your **spiritual illness** can only be cured by your actively and willfully taking into yourself Christ.

Romans 10: 9-11; "For if you tell others with your own mouth that Jesus Christ is your Lord, and believe in your own heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in his heart that a man becomes right with God; and with his mouth he tells others of his faith, confirming his salvation. For the scriptures tell us that no one who believes in Christ will ever be disappointed."

If you would like to fulfill your own personal need for God, through a relationship with Jesus, you can do it now. As the Scripture says, “If you take Jesus into your heart and confess your faith to others with your mouth you will be saved.” You can simply and faithfully establish your position in Christ by reciting the Sinner’s Prayer to God.

“Dear Heavenly Father, I need your help in my life. I am a sinner and I need your love and forgiveness. I ask for and receive your Son, Jesus, into my life as my Savior and as my Lord. Thank you for your love, your forgiveness and for eternal life. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.”

Take delight in your relationship with the Master of the universe through your relationship with His Son, Jesus!! Your new life in Christ, with the reality of His unconditional love, His forgiveness and His promise of eternal life will fill your life with the fruits of the Spirit. To personally experience these fruits is the inward evidence of your new life. I have found these fruits to be the desire of every person’s life and heart.

Galatians —5:22; “But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, He will produce this kind of fruit in us--love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and selfcontrol.

The full faith and reality of the presence of Christ in our lives is to be experienced at all times, but especially in times of need. In our trials and tribulations, we will overcome our circumstances, our adversary, our hardships, our persecutions and our difficulties to the glory of Christ. I have found it very understandable to endure hardships and sufferings when there is an ultimate purpose to be gained. God's purpose in each one of our lives is for others to see Jesus in us. The security we have is that all things that come our way in life are for our ultimate good.

Romans 8:28; "And we know that all that happens to us is working for our own good if we love God and are fitting into His plans."

This Scripture becomes a reality when our faith elevates us above our living circumstance. Whatever happens to a believer in Christ is the very best that God has to offer in order to accomplish His full purpose in our lives, which is to become more like Christ. So, no matter what situation or circumstance enters our lives, God will fashion them and conform them in a way which will serve our best good. All we need to do is rest in our faith that God and His purpose has the ultimate authority over everything in our lives and will conform them to our ultimate benefit.

Colossians 3:10-11; "You are living a brand new kind of life that is continually learning more and more of what is right, and trying constantly to be more and more like Christ who created this new life within you."

The final constant in our ever changing world and lives, and our final safety net as believers in Christ is His constancy and His perpetual presence in our lives. Despite the fact that we may at times depart from God, he never departs from us who are His own. As I have personally discovered, our circumstances may change, but God never changes. There is no other constant in this ever changing world or in our ever changing lives. God's availability to us in any situation or circumstance is in the person of His unchangeable Son.

Hebrews 3:8; "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. So do not be attracted by strange new ideas."

To this day, I think my families' foundation of basic Christian moral values, perspective of salvation being based on an exercise of personal freedom of choice and Elva's faith in my salvation had a great deal to do with the fact that Jesus did save me. In fact, over the years He has saved my whole family. God honored my parents' moral values, their ethic of freedom of choice and Elva's

simple and unceasing faith by saving us all! Such work can more easily be accomplished in an atmosphere of personal freedom, not bound by the rituals, traditions, or the mechanics of religion. For true salvation has little to do with a religion and all to do with a free choice of a relationship with God through Christ.

How ironic, the power of a simple faithful servant has led to the salvation of our whole family. Ironic, from the perspective of the world, but very predictable from God's perspective. He again and again uses the simple and weak from the worldly perspective to confound the wise and the strong. I thank Elva for her ever present faith and dedication to me and my families' salvation.

I am especially thankful to God that Elva and my parents have lived to see the fruition of their freedom and faith. God has always surrounded me in some way, shape or form by His presence. I will always be grateful to Pastor Steve, his wife, Becky and children, Greg and Niki, for crossing my path at just the right place and right time. Their faith and courage led me to my saving faith, knowledge and acceptance of the Gospel of Jesus. I think God presents us all, at various times in our lives, with equal opportunities to come to accept Jesus. Unless we continually reject Him with hardened hearts, at which time, He withdraws from our presence.

Now, to make your *new life* fulfilling and meaningful, commit your life to following Jesus. After trusting Christ,

your faith will be strengthened and your *new life* will be blessed by becoming an active participant in a Bible believing, and a Bible preaching church.

John 8:31-32; "Jesus said to them, 'If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.'"

Romans 10:17; "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

After accepting Jesus, you are commanded to be Scripturally baptized.

Acts 8:36-37; "Now as Philip and the Eunuch went down the road, they came to some water. And the Eunuch said, 'See here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?' Then Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.' So he commanded the chariot to stop. And both Philip and the Eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him."

Just as our willful and faithful acceptance of Christ establishes our salvation, our willful and faithful commitment to follow Christ is established in our baptism.

Romans 6:3-5; "For sin's power over us was broken when we became Christians and were baptized to become a part of Jesus Christ; through His death the power of your sinful nature was shattered. Your old sin-loving nature was buried with Him by baptism when He died, and when God the Father with glorious power, brought Him back to life again, you were given His wonderful new life to enjoy. For you have become a part of Him, and so you died with Him, so to speak, when He died; and now you share this new life, and shall rise as He did.

These are all outward signs to the world of your new life and the strength of your commitment to follow Christ. Our most profound command then follows with the action of this admonition from Christ to each of us as His very own.

Matthew 28:18-20; "Jesus told his disciples, 'I have been given all authority in Heaven and Earth. Therefore go and make disciples in all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and then teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you; and be sure of this - that I am with you always, even to the end of the world.'"

So states the prescription for all of mankind. To be dispensed with an attitude and spirit of love.

Galatians 5:14; "For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: "Love others as you love yourself."

If you have made this commitment to follow Christ, and He has changed your life, we would like to hear from you. If we can further assist you in making that decision, feel free to correspond with us at the following address:

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We would like to offer our assistance to you in your growth and development in your new Christian life.

May God richly bless you!
A sinner saved by faith in God's grace.

Mark Paul Bishop, M.D.