

Riches to Rags to Riches in Glory

A true story about two lives and a
testimony to the Grace, Glory, and
Power of God

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Part One

The Journey Begins

Based on a true story this book chronicles the life of a man that we'll call Paul and also his wife whom we'll call Lynn. Each character in this book represents a real person, most names have been changed to hide identity and to retain all glory for God. This story is mostly written in the "first person"; that means it's written mostly as if Paul is telling his own story. It's a story about Paul and Lynn's life and their walk with their Savior, Jesus Christ. It's a story about how Paul and Lynn were both called out of darkness and brought into the Kingdom of God.

Although my family lived in some other states when I was young, I was mostly raised on the outskirts of a city in northeast Ohio. We lived just about on the edge of that city. Our house was just a block away from the county fair grounds and a big forest. It was more like suburbs than city living. As a young man, I'd go fishing in the ponds that were in the forest. My brother and I spent a lot of time back there. Not too many people went in the forest, so it was a quiet place. There were plenty of trails for hiking and riding our bicycles. There were stables at the fair grounds where people kept several racing horses. In the mornings, during the summer,

my brother and I use to watch the horses race. I always enjoyed the outdoors. We had some farmers in our family. I enjoyed visiting their farms. Farm work wasn't as bad as what some people made it out to be, all you had to do is get busy and get it done, just like anything else. I think I remember visiting my Great Uncle Russ's farm, his wife, Aunt Mary, use to be Amish, I seem to remember her relatives coming by their farm with their horse and buggy. Uncle Russ was my Grandma M's brother, he was Mennonite until he married Mary, then they both joined the German Baptists, the Dunkard Brethren Church. Anyway I liked seeing the horses. Growing up I had some friends who had horses, I liked riding the horses to. Other than that I'd say I was born and raised as a typical American, in the sense that my parents divorced when I was ten, and my family was mostly religious. We were an upper-middle income family. I had one brother and one sister. My mom's family was mostly from Mennonite background, but somehow Grandma M switched to Pentecostalism. She seemed to somewhat straddle the fence between Mennonite and Pentecostal. My mom was Pentecostal, at least until she got divorced. Grandma M spoke a few words of Pennsylvania Dutch once in a while, but Mom didn't learn any, and we children learned just a few words, most of which I don't remember.

In my Dad's family there were some Baptists and some relatives who became German Baptists, but many in his family didn't go to any church. Grandpa App for example, my dad's dad, was from the foothills of Appalachia. He didn't believe in church and use to make fun of us for going. Although he didn't believe in church he did believe that there were powers and a god that existed, but he didn't think that his idea of a god was really paying much attention to what we did. It was on his death bed, when Grandpa App accepted Christ. That man suffered for a long time, he just wouldn't die. He was afraid that maybe all that church stuff was real. A minister talked with him as well as some friends. Then after Grandpa App accepted Jesus Christ as his Savior he died, just a little bit after. I remember another story about Grandpa App. I remember one evening when we were at Grandpa App's house and he thought he'd pass on a little bit of tradition. He started teaching me about "the miracle of corn mash", as some hillbillies might say, that's making moonshine whiskey. Well my mom just about had a fit that night and we didn't stay long after that. There were some good things I learned from Grandpa App though. Like his example of gardening, he had about an acre of land and grew just about all the food that he and Grandma App needed. That little bit of knowledge came in handy later in life.

I was raised with many Christian values in a somewhat Christian environment. I knew there was God who had a Son named Jesus but I didn't really know much more than that. I wasn't totally ignorant but I wasn't totally informed either. I knew Jesus died for me, but I didn't know or maybe I didn't believe that I really needed to do anything, I guess I didn't understand it all and no one was explaining it. I wasn't taken to church that much after the age of ten. And even when we did go to church it was almost always a different one. After we stopped going to church the basic values taught at home stayed the same for a little while, and we continued reading the Bible. I believed in God enough to pray to Him for help and to ask Him for things. Looking back I think I was looking at God as my personal genie, I know at times I was treating Him that way, but that's what I learned to do from the Pentecostals and so no one corrected me. By the age of fourteen or fifteen I really depended on God, but I didn't fully realize I was a sinner. When I was sixteen years old I prayed that God would at least let me meet the girl He made for me to marry. Well shortly after that, the next day in fact, I met three girls, all of whom were friends. So my thoughts ran, maybe one of these girls is it, but the time wasn't right to know which one. Today I know that prayer was answered and today I know which one, because I married one of those girls, and her name is Lynn.

Lynn was raised in the country side. Her family grew a garden every year. There was a large pond behind their house with plenty of ducks, geese, fish, turtles and frogs. The pond had an island in the middle of it and one of the most memorable summers of Lynn's life, her and her friends camped out on the island. Directly behind the pond, there was a large forest with many hiking trails and also plenty of deer. There was also a field adjacent to her parent's property so Lynn and her friends use to play and hide in the tall grass. In addition, there was a farm adjacent to the small neighborhood they lived in. The farmer grew corn and raised sheep. Lynn often visited the farmer's sheep, especially if there were new born lambs. Also there were larger farms nearby so Lynn grew accustomed to the sights and smells of the farm. She also remembers seeing many Amish horse and buggies frequent the roads traveling to the flea markets in the village near by.

In Lynn's family life, her parents were Catholic and all her relatives were Catholic, except her one grandma was a Baptist. Lynn had three brothers and two sisters. Her family was a very religious family in that they went to Mass (Catholic service) every sunday and other special services that they were obligated to attend. Both of her parents were also teachers/administrators in the Catholic schools. Because of this circumstance, her family

was very well known in the Catholic circles of that area. In addition, her parents sent all of their children to Catholic schools. Her life was centered on the Catholic church. So of course Lynn attended Catholic schools all the way through high school. Like me Lynn knew God existed, but did not really know how to serve Him, and she didn't fully realize that she was a sinner yet either.

I had played the guitar since I was ten years old and through going to public school I learned about different types of music. When I was about fifteen I decided to pursue a career in music. I had gotten some friends together who also played instruments and we formed a little band, which went no where. Around sixteen I moved to my dad's house. At dad's house there were fewer rules and much more time for music. By seventeen years of age I was really serious about music. I formed a new band and chose the name "Chaos" for it; I got rid of everyone from the other group, even Lynn, my girl friend by this time. I found people who were much more serious about a career in music. The new band played anything that got us recognition; unfortunately the kind of music that took us places was what was called "alternative rock music". The name Chaos started to get known some once we switched to that type of music. It wasn't long before we got in contact with an underground music magazine and had an interview.

Some time later we went to a recording studio and recorded a couple of songs. It was probably here, at this time that I really started to fall away from just about everything I knew about God.

Part Two

The Path to Heaven or the Highway to Hell

The people in my band were increasingly attracted to the occult. The alternative rock scene is fueled by occult activity and songs about those kinds of things. I was very uncomfortable with what was happening. I still believed in God, but I thought as long as I didn't do what they did, I could still stay in this kind of lifestyle. At that time I didn't understand what I was doing and the little bit of fame that we were starting to get made it seem too hard for me to leave, at that time. I thought maybe I can teach these people about God, but I myself didn't really know much about God, and most of the people we dealt with didn't care to know God.

In Lynn's teen years, she really started questioning what she was here for. During this time, Lynn was what most people would call a 'loner'. She spent much of her time alone and searching for something to fill a void in her life. It was at this time that she had begun to question her beliefs in God and Jesus. Although Lynn started to question her belief in God, she can say that she never fully gave up on God. She didn't understand it then but now she knows God was working on her heart. But it was hard for her. The Catholic church taught

many things that contradicted the Bible. Some teachings the Bible even calls blaspheme or idolatry. So the question of what is really right and wrong started to come up.

As my teen years were coming to a close I hit a big turning point. I was over nineteen years old when I was offered a recording contract. The band had enough songs written for two complete albums. The first album to be released to the public was called "Surrounded in Darkness". Our name was getting known and more importantly to me, my name was getting known. There were times when I'd be out some place and other young people would take my picture or just watch me. I recall an incident when I was out with Lynn, my fiancée at that time; we were driving down the highway when a van full of teenagers came up beside us. They recognized me and drove along side of us for several miles trying to get our attention. Another incident I remember vividly was when a young man stopped his S.U.V. in the middle of a busy intersection and took my picture. I was overtaken with the possibility of success and all the worldly glitter that this recording contract was promised to bring. The band was always called Chaos but one of the things that came up was, the band didn't matter, they were replaceable. I was the main song writer so I was the man that the deal would be made with. I would be Chaos and my band would be whoever I

said. Some of the things that were part of the Chaos record deal were my own limousine for every concert, no matter how large or small a show I, and my band, would always get my stretch-limo. I would even get bodyguards at concerts to keep people away from me, and the record company would hire photographers to take pictures at each concert and a film crew for some large concerts, and the money sounded very tempting. I owned a five hundred watt stereo amplifier and seven guitars all of which cost several thousand dollars, it took a long time for me to earn enough to buy these things, but now I was told about a deal that would also provide me with new guitars for free every once in a while, all I had to do was endorse and publicly play the same brand of guitars. I had everything I thought I wanted. In the world's eye's I was an up coming rock star and all I had to do was sign my name and write and play some music. I fought with it, I wanted it, and I was sick from it; mammon had a hold on me. It had a hold on my body, my lifestyle, and almost on my soul.

I never set out to have anything to do with alternative rock music or the occult, as I said before the other people in the band were getting into that stuff. I didn't like it at all. Lynn could remember listening to the songs written by those people and being really honestly terrified about the things she heard. I thought maybe I could play some other type

of music, but the deal was; play alternative rock or get nothing. It took a little while for me to reach a decision, they baited the hook real good, but I never did sign that contract. I felt in my heart that I could not give myself, my talent, or my life for that kind of deal. It was a hard decision in some ways, but ultimately that music led people to Hell and I knew it, and I could not produce that garbage anymore. I wasn't living for God, and I wasn't a Christian, and I knew it. I knew that God is real, and He couldn't like what I was doing. I felt ashamed, and got very depressed, I moved to a little town in the country side in a southern county, and thankfully no one knew me there. Lynn had also told me that she felt that the music was leading people down the wrong path and had felt relieved that we were not going to make that music anymore. She had also shared with me that she felt she wasn't doing things right in her life either.

Once I was in that small town I fell into a real slump, I felt like I was nothing. I wanted to hide from everything, and after a few months I moved to my mom's house. I started reading the Bible again and trying to seek God. I was still worldly and I had bought a Cadillac with tinted windows and a flashy two tone blue paint job. People still recognized me and I wanted a car that would hide me, but I still wanted a car that would show that I was somebody.

Part Three

Finding Salvation

At the age of twenty years old, I believe I was born again. I was in a state of depression, I thought I had no where to turn. I knew I was a filthy sinner, and I would go to Hell if I died. I was afraid of death, and I was afraid of life. I felt guilty for everything I'd ever done, and I knew that I deserved to go to Hell. But I didn't want to go there; I prayed to God and told Him these things. I begged Him to help me, and searched for the right way to live. I realized that Jesus Christ died for me and He paid it all. But I still needed to live differently than how I was. By this time I was use to staying out late and living fast. I hadn't worked for a couple years, for several reasons; first of all I didn't have to and secondly I didn't want to be recognized. But now I was confronted with the fact that the money was running out. I actually asked God for a sign that He accepted me. Today I know it's wrong to seek signs, but back then I didn't know. I asked for money and God answered with money. I received a gift, a sort of early inheritance. With the money I was promised to receive I decided I'm going to get a new car. I wanted a Jaguar, but a friend of mine, who owned a Cadillac dealership, offered me a deal, so I bought another Cadillac. I about ruined my

other Cadillac by now anyways, as I said before, I liked to live fast. Today I realize I should have bought something simpler, but I didn't think of that at the time. I was a new Christian but I was still very worldly.

Shortly after I was born again, Lynn became born again as well. She saw several good changes beginning to happen in me and she felt the need to get right with God to. We were going to a local non-denominational church that was teaching about Revelation and end times prophesy. We were personally studying and discussing some of the different rituals that some churches have and we were searching the Bible to see if they had any relevancy at all. There was this one Bible verse that kept ringing in her mind.

Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no *man* cometh unto the Father, but by me.

John 14:6

One of the most memorable moments for Lynn was the following sunday. After the church service, before dismissing the congregation the minister had said something like 'If you left this church after the service was over, got into a car accident and died and you knew you had not given your heart to Jesus and made Him Lord of your life,

would you really go to heaven?'. It was then, when the minister had invited people to come to the front of the church house, to surrender their whole lives to Jesus that it all came together in Lynn's mind and she knew she was a sinner and needed to be saved from her sins and from Hell's fire, and only Jesus could save. Lynn repented and knew that God had forgiven her, now we were both born again.

We each started living differently. We usually met together on the weekends, throughout the week we talked over the telephone, just like always. We always went to church together after that and we read the Bible together. As we saw things in our own lives or in each others lives, we'd discuss it. We each had things to change. We continually and progressively removed things from our own lives, things that we saw through Scripture that we weren't doing right.

Part Four

Learning the Path That Jesus Trod

I started college when I was twenty years old. Lynn started at the same time. Our schools were close by each other so we were together often. She studied English and education. She thought she might be a teacher. I studied Architecture, I was going to be an architect, but after two years of college I felt like my life needed to take a different route, but I wasn't sure what to do. After college, at the age of twenty two, I started working for an architectural firm in another city. At that same time I started a correspondence course from a Christian college with the hope of working as a missionary or minister of some kind. I still had a problem with worldly things though. I was now becoming successful in my career. I was now looking at some very expensive homes. I recall trying to decide between a one hundred year old 4,000 square foot Tudor house and a new house that was 6,000 square feet. Around this time I really started getting convicted in my heart about wealth and worldliness. I ended up buying a cheap house in the inner city instead, it was 1,700 square feet, and a lot more humble than the others I'd been looking at.

My mom had cancer in these last couple years. She almost died now she struggled to pay the

medical bills. So instead of her renting from strangers I thought she could live with me. So I opened my doors then my brother, sister, and mom all moved in with me. I thought maybe I could get everyone into church.

During my time in secular college I learned about the Bruderhof Communities, and then as I looked a little deeper at them, I later learned about the Jewish Kibbutz and the Hutterites and many other communities to. I was somewhat intrigued by their lifestyle and I found through study of the scriptures that the community life was not only practiced in the Old Testament but also in the New Testament. In Acts chapters two and four the Christians were living in community. In the Gospels Jesus and His disciples lived not only communally but also nomadically. I did not however think that community life was required by scripture in order to be saved and I did not believe that it was for everyone. With further research I learned more of the Christian monastic movements, before they were dominated by Catholicism. I learned further that Christian communities have existed from the time of Christ until today. In fact in the past it was much more common. Today community life is looked down upon, and usually treated in a derogatory way. The Anabaptist churches in fact have all descended from communities. A trail of martyr's blood, Bible doctrine and community life

extends from the time of Christ unto this very day. So this also influenced me in opening my home, at first to my relatives then eventually to others as well. At one point there were six other people living in my four bedroom house and I slept in what was supposed to be the Library. It was mostly a good experience.

Lynn and I continued meeting together on weekends and during the week if we had time. We searched for a church together. We had attended at several different churches by now and we were convinced that most of the churches are false and we needed to find some that were real. We read through the Bible and tried to get a picture in our minds of what a real church should look like. We saw in the Scriptures that a True Christian church would teach about Salvation, being born again, and adult baptism, in addition they'd teach about head covering (1 Corinthians 11:2-16), not allow women preachers (1 Corinthians 14:34; 1 Timothy 2:11-12, 3:2, 3:12; Titus 1:6), they'd have communion and foot washing (John 13:2-15). We saw further that a True church should have daily service or teach their people to have a daily service or devotional time at home (Acts 2:46, 5:42), they would be simple in their lifestyle, they would not have an altar in their meeting places, they would have communal meals (fellowship meals) (Acts 2:46), they would not put special emphasis on clothing or things, they would

be modest and teach and practice modesty, they would condemn sinful practices, and they would not read the counterfeit bibles (Deuteronomy 4:2, Revelation 22:18). Once we began to build this model based on Scripture we started comparing various churches to it.

We strongly felt the Catholic church was false because they continually contradicted the Scripture, in fact they went against most of what we found in Scripture, some things were that they baptize babies, pray to idols, and pray to dead people that they think have special powers.

We checked out the Messianic Jewish Movement and were involved in that for about two years. Some men covered their heads during services and some women didn't, so there were those that had that flipped around, but not all. Most women did practice head covering, in religious services. Some Messianic Jews even dressed somewhat plain. In fact I had a hat and overcoat that some Amish friends mistook as being Amish clothing.

After a while Lynn and I started looking more closely at some of the other churches we knew about. The Mennonites, Pentecostals, Baptists and German Baptist Brethren were all churches that people in my family attended. We started checking these churches out and comparing them to the Scriptural model. We quickly ruled out the

Pentecostals, some reasons were because they put so much emphasis on getting rich and they teach if you're not rich or you get sick then you're not much of a Christian. And if you don't speak in their version of tongues then you're not saved, so you must be going to Hell, even after being born again.

When I was twenty four we started attending regularly at a German Baptist church, the "Church of the Brethren". The church was situated in the countryside, just outside of the city where I lived. I didn't know that the particular church Lynn and I decided to attend was also attended by some of my family. In fact my uncle was a deacon there. Lynn and I felt a little more at ease once we realized some people we knew went there as well. We stayed at that church for a long time. After a while Lynn and I wanted to be baptized, because now we knew what baptism meant. To us it meant giving ourselves to God, kind of like a marriage, but even more serious. We now belonged to God, completely, forever, and we wanted to show that to everyone. So we were baptized upon our confession of faith. We were immersed three times forward in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The Brethren also further helped in convicting both of us of still being somewhat worldly. We agreed with their views on simplicity. They had a few things to say about my shiny white Cadillac to, but once they explained their position, I found I agreed with them.

Part Five

The Price of Being a Disciple

Compared to the average person, I was a wealthy man. I wasn't a millionaire, but I had more money than what most people had. Before we met the Brethren, Lynn and I use to regularly dine in some very expensive restaurants. On most weekends we would spend a couple hundred dollars or so on eating out, or going to festivals, or movies, or traveling. I recall some meals costing \$90 just for the two of us. And I could afford to live this way, but neither of us was ever really happy, only entertained for a little while. I was really very miserable inside and I spent more time at the office than anywhere else. It took forty five minutes to an hour to get to work; then I'd spend nine hours and many times eleven or twelve hours working there before I'd go home and start my own work. I was working all the time, I was chasing money. What I had, looking back, wasn't success in my eyes, but it was the fruits of chasing money, eventually you start to catch some of it. The weekends were a way of escape for me. From time to time certain passages of Scripture would really bother me, for example:

Jesus Said unto him, if thou wilt be perfect, go *and* sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come *and* follow me.

But when the young man heard *that* saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich *man* shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.

And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich *man* to enter into the kingdom of God.

Matthew 19:21-24

And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully:

And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?

And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods.

And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, *and* be merry.

But God said unto him, *Thou* fool, this night

thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall *those things* be, which thou hast provided?

So *is* he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God.

Luke 12:16-21

Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth.

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Luke 12:32-34

There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day:

And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores,

And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich *man's* table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

And it came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich *man* also died, and was buried;

And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus

in his bosom.

And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.

But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good *things*, and likewise Lazarus evil *things*: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.

Luke 16:19-25

Now when Jesus heard these *things*, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one *thing*: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me.

And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich.

And when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful, he said, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!

Luke 18:22-24

And Zaccheus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any *thing* from any *man* by false accusation, I restore *him* fourfold.

And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham.

For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

Luke 19:8-10

And all that believed were together, and had all *things* common;

And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all *men*, as every *man* had need.

Acts 2:44-45

And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any *of them* that ought of the *things* which he possessed was his own; but they had all *things* common.

Acts 4:32

All these Scriptures condemned the way I was previously living. What bothered me back then was that I found it hard to believe that Jesus would really want anyone to give up everything. It was hard for me to believe that it really is a sin to make yourself rich. The preachers on T.V. never preached about that and none of the worldly churches ever had sermons on that subject. In fact the worldly churches all preached that God is here to bless you and give you things and make you rich, but Jesus said deny yourself not indulge yourself, and give away all you have.

When I got away from the false and worldly

churches and I turned off that worthless T.V. and I turned to God only, He lead me to a people that helped me understand that God really does call us to a simple life. Before God lead me to that understanding, I gave a little here and there when someone would make their needs known to me, but eventually I realized I was wrong and was giving grudgingly. I tried to do better. I remember one incident when a homeless man asked me for money, as he talked about why he was homeless and how terrible his life was I was thinking about all the luxury I had and how much more this man might appreciate it. I felt convicted, I felt like I'm really selfish. I have more than what I need and this man slept in the park with nothing, just a few hundred feet from my front door, now he's here asking for some crumbs from my table. I think I felt kind of like the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31. I didn't want to be like that, I knew what Jesus would do.

Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.

Matthew 5:42

So I gave the homeless man more than he expected and talked to him about Christ and Salvation. Then the next time I saw him I did it again and it felt good to give. Some people warned

me against doing this and said he's lazy or he'll just spend the money on booze. But I saw it another way, if the man was lying to me then he'll answer to God for it, but if his need is real and I have the means to help and don't help then I'll have to answer to God for it (read Matthew 25:31-46). I later found out that this homeless man was able to get an apartment with some of the money I gave him and he then was able to get a job. I also found out he had a wife and baby that he didn't previously tell me about. So if I would have listened to my so called friends and ignored this guy maybe that baby would have died in the streets or in the park.

I'd like to take an opportunity to straighten something out here. Most people don't realize that homeless people can't easily get a job, because if you don't have a legitimate address then you cannot be legally employed. That silly law keeps those people homeless. So the best thing is to get them a legitimate address, then they can work, then you'll find out if they're lazy or not. And I'd like to encourage you readers to volunteer at least one day at a homeless shelter, there's at least one in every major city, they're not hard to find. Remember Jesus will say to everyone someday; "Inasmuch as ye have done *it* unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done *it* unto me" (Matthew 25:40) or "Inasmuch as ye did *it* not to one of the least of these, ye did *it* not to me" (Matthew 25:45). Those

verses could apply to any charitable work, but I want to encourage you in this work. And don't ever say a person is homeless because they're lazy. I know that maybe half of them might be lazy, but the other half are not. Many homeless people are sick, some are mentally ill; others have come into hard times for some reason or another. There are those who are lazy, or liars, or hooked on drugs or alcohol, but not all. The women who need help easily find help but the men who need help rarely find help. So when you see these people remember to be like Christ, He said: "Give to every man that asketh of thee", Luke 6:30.

I tried to do better in my giving, better than in the past, I started making loans to people then later forgiving their debt and then other times I just started giving things away. I felt convicted in this area, I found myself giving up over half of everything I had.

Shortly after Lynn and I started attending at the Church of the Brethren we got married. After eight years of seeing each other. We were finally done with college and we were both right with God and the time had finally come. One of the things we had gotten right, and had felt very serious about through our time together, was that we never lived together before marriage. We knew that would be wrong, we were both taught right in this area. Lynn always lived with her parents. Now as the time of

our wedding came near I found myself starting to get the house ready. Everyone that was living at my house had moved out, everything just seemed to be falling in place.

For our wedding Lynn and I had to compromise a little with her family. They wanted to see us become Catholic and they wanted us to have a Catholic wedding. We wanted a simple Christian wedding. We only compromised in areas that we felt didn't really matter. We got married in a Catholic church, but we did not have a Catholic wedding. What we had was; a deacon performed a very basic service without any of the Catholic rituals. The deacon basically gave a short sermon about love and marriage. Then certain people read certain passages of Scripture that we had chosen for them to read. Lynn and I put plain wedding bands on each other and that was about it. Then our reception was at a Mennonite restaurant in another nearby town. We didn't have any worldly music and no alcohol and there was no dancing at our wedding reception either. We still managed to make some waves in the family even though the service was at a Catholic church. Some of Lynn's relatives let us know they weren't happy because we didn't have any alcohol or dancing at our reception, some even walked out after we arrived. Lynn's one relative for example; before the wedding, invited us to come to her house the day after our wedding,

then when we arrived the next day, she informed us that we were never welcome in her house ever again. Some of Lynn's family avoided us after we got married. They still do, about three years later; some of them don't want anything to do with us. It got worse when they all found out we had joined the German Baptist Brethren. Christ said division would come because of Him.

Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division:

For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three.

The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.

Luke 12:51-53

And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, There is no *man* that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake,

Who shall not receive manifold more in this *present* time, and in the world to come life everlasting.

Luke 18:29-30

Part Six

War Between Two Kingdoms

Lynn was a homemaker and a substitute teacher. We didn't need any extra income, but we felt like we should both be at home together. We opened a day care business, that Lynn would run to get us started. She gave her time more than charging for it. That business ended up being more like a ministry, and I kept my regular job.

While I was finishing up my Bible college correspondence course, I got in contact with a prison ministry. I started volunteering and after some time they asked me to be one of their pastors. I didn't have to do any public speaking so I took the position. My post was as "Pastor of Christian Education" it was voluntary work. What I did was put together a Bible study correspondence course on basic Christian teachings. This Bible course was sent into the prisons through the mail. I would develop and administer the course and write letters to inmates, answer letters and so on. I learned pretty quickly; don't ask anyone what they did to get put in prison. That could really challenge your faith. There was this one guy that we'll call Gus, he had been in prison for maybe ten or fifteen years before I'd started corresponding with him. In his letters he talked like a preacher, he knew Christ for some

years now and it showed. The other two pastors counseled Gus and visited with him many times. I knew Gus was in prison for life with no chance of ever getting out, but I didn't know why. Gus was also our inside missionary. He was leading people to Christ. The ministry grew in that prison partly because of the work God did through Gus. This guy even wrote a column in our monthly newsletter. Anyway Gus was really upset he wrote me a letter about how he still sometimes struggles with the question; how could God really forgive him. Gus knew he was forgiven, but he felt terrible about what he did. I tried to be really encouraging in my letter, then I wrote something like; I don't think you could've done anything so terrible that you should feel like this, what did you do to get put in prison? Then Gus wrote back and told me what he did. Gus felt that he had a demon in him at the time he committed his crime. He had broken into some place. There were these seven women there and he tied them down so he could rob the place. They wouldn't be quiet so Gus beat them up to make them be quiet. Gus proceeded to rob the place. Then before he left, he raped one woman and then killed her. Then he raped the next one and killed her. Gus raped and killed all seven of those women. After reading this I also struggled with; how could God forgive Gus? I did come to peace with this and I

then decided I'm not going to ask anyone else what they did to get put in prison.

After some time people at church found out I was working with the prison ministry and they also asked me to help out at the church and be on the finance board, which was kind of like being a deacon, so I did that for a time as well, but it started becoming more of a chore than a blessing to be involved in so many things.

Our church was fairly conservative, but also divided on some issues. I'd say about 75% of the women at our church kept the head covering, except at love feast (communion) when it was required and enforced that they all wear it. All the women wore dresses, most had prints a few were solid (plain). Most of the men had beards some trimmed off mustaches. Men mostly wore dark pants and plaid flannel or plain button down shirts. There were also some people who dressed in fancy clothes but they weren't there every sunday, in fact they rarely showed up. The church had around one hundred members plus children and those people who didn't want membership for some reason or another. As time went on Lynn and I both felt convicted about some things in our church, one of which had actually divided the church. Our church had previously split into two congregations over the question of finances and women preachers. I'd say a little less than half of our church's membership was

also members at the other congregation to. That other congregation was very liberal, and those people with this dual membership could vote in both churches, even though they only attended each church about half the time. As I understood it each Church of the Brethren congregation is suppose to have two elders, also called pastors (bishops), anyway a couple years after the split the remaining congregation again started to become divided about these issues. Our congregation ordained only one new elder (a man) some of the congregation, I think partly those with this dual membership; viewed his wife as being the other elder but that was not official and our congregation would not give her any pay or official authority. But when the pastor became very ill, in fact he couldn't stand or preach at one point; his wife then started doing the preaching and leading. This caused controversy and more division because it contradicts Scripture; the Bible does not permit women to be elders or deacons.

Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but *they are commanded* to be under obedience, as also saith the law.

And if they will learn any *thing*, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.

1 Corinthians 14:34-35

Let the women learn in silence with all subjection.

But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.

1 Timothy 2:11-12

A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife...

1 Timothy 3:2

Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife...

1 Timothy 3:12

...ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee:

If any be blameless, the husband of one wife...

Titus 1:5-6

The other issue Lynn and I had a problem with was bible versions. There were some people who believed that the modern versions, which are actually Catholic versions, were acceptable, even with the verse removals, verse corruptions and changes. We split on these issues.

I was already a pastor with the prison ministry and so when our small bible study group started meeting in our house for sunday service as

well, I became their elder to. The group became a small but regular congregation. So after about six months or so, we chose a name for the new church. We saw this little church as still being Brethren, but our new church was more conservative on certain issues. Our new church was also an outreach ministry and the congregation met in our house for everything. I left the other prison ministry and devoted all my free time to the new church, which also had its own prison ministry. Jesus Christ was our focus and charitable giving and living was another area of focus for the church, hard messages to preach in the inner city, but these messages are much needed. While Lynn and I were still with the Church of the Brethren, we felt moved toward the idea of Christian community. We met some Hutterites and we knew of a bunch of other communities as well. We tried to open our home for similar uses, but that didn't work out so well. We actually had received some persecution in the inner city. We didn't feel right about being there anymore. We dressed modestly and plain, Lynn wore a black veil on her head and her dresses were long and I had my beard with no mustache, we wore dark clothes. Our back yard was about ninety percent garden. It was also obvious we had a church meeting in our house a few times a week. Some guests dressed plain most dressed at least plainer than our neighbors did. We stuck out like a sore

thumb. Some neighbors were being very rude, one even threatened to start getting violent. This guy sat in his truck at two or three in the morning and just kept revving up the engine, he didn't like being talked to about it, and he refused to obey the law, so we decided the Lord can deal with him about it, we prayed and tried hard to let it go. Our neighbors, without permission, would park their cars in our front yard and in our driveway or they would block our driveway with their vehicles, and they would mouth off when we asked them to move. Some people would walk through our front yard and even walk through the back yard cussing and profaning as they went. People often threw trash in our yard. Another neighbor, a couple doors down, he and his family would watch us out their windows. The public parks were really close to the house and all kinds of things would happen and all kinds of people would come by. There were prostitutes in the parks and one even knocked on our door, they didn't come to get ministered to about Jesus Christ, but that's what they got. The inner city is definitely a place for an outreach, but we eventually couldn't take it anymore. We had to move. The Brethren use to ask us how we could live in the city; we were the only ones who did. It was rough but we did reach some people for Christ. Lynn and I felt like we were in a war zone. We were the only ones living in the midst of this, we felt alone and we felt the hatred of

our neighbors on a daily basis. We'd been having some problems with people making trouble and there were several burglaries in our area. I was uneasy leaving my wife at home while I went off to work for ten to eleven hours Monday thru Friday. We trusted in God and lived by faith; it was a real challenge at times. Lynn and I eventually got two dogs; one was a Basset Hound and Beagle mix. That dog was small but when he howled, bayed, and barked he sounded like a big dog. That dog scared away some bad people and kept our violent neighbor and everyone else out of our yard.

It was still tough in that part of the city though. And we really felt alone. I owned that house for about four years and Lynn lived there, after we got married, for about a year and a half. Toward the end we were thinking of selling off everything and joining one of the communities we were in contact with, but then we felt that idea came in desperation and was not the right way to decide whether we should join or not.

We found a smaller house in the country with almost an acre of land, and we moved. The church congregation disbanded but I continued to keep up the prison ministry. A while after our move to the country I was approached by some members from our old Church of the Brethren congregation. The elder at our old church had to step down due to

his poor health and his wife would not be accepted as a pastor. So these people asked me to come back and be an elder for the church. I didn't feel able to do what they wanted, so I turned them down.

Now at twenty eight years old, I and my wife Lynn attend at another plain church and we like it there. It's kind of a funny story how we found this church. Lynn and I were told where this church house was and this person that told us thought that it might be an Old German Baptist church but they weren't sure. One sunday, the service was over early at our church, so Lynn and I drove by this supposed German Baptist church. We saw a bunch of vans, cars, etc. in the parking lot and across the road, but we also saw two buggies in the parking lot. There were also people outside some were eating, and the women wore white veils on there heads. We said to each other "what kind of a church is that". We didn't get around to visiting because we lived too far away. Then when we moved it was nearer to that area, we prayed and started looking at some other churches, when we remembered that church with two buggies and white veils we'd driven by about a year or more ago. We visited and we've been there ever since.

Lynn and I are also going to have a baby, after three years of marriage. When she was in her teens she had some medical problems and a doctor told her she would never have children. Then later

after we got married some Catholic relatives implied that we weren't having any children because we didn't offer flowers to the idol of Mary for fertility in a Catholic wedding. But God crushed those lies. God can heal any illness, and God is bigger than any superstitious belief.

I lost my job in architecture after five years of service; I actually feel this was God answering my prayers. I saw that door closing as an opportunity. With the Lord's urging I left that career and any wealth I had in this world. Today my own small family lives, by choice, in what the modern world would call poverty, but we call it simplicity. I don't mean that we do without necessities, all our needs are met. We simply don't want to spend our time and money on unnecessary worldly things that will all burn one day anyways.

...and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burnt up.

2 Peter 3:10

We live a very simple life compared to where we started. We canceled the cable T.V. many years ago; in fact Lynn and I hadn't had it since back when we lived with our parents. We got rid of the internet many years ago to, and we canceled all magazine subscriptions, cell phones, pager service

etc. a long time ago. We live in a small rented house which gets a little cramped from time to time, but it's all we need. My wife stays home and tends to the home, and I work from home running my own small business. Over the last several years we've been growing most of our food and we give away the extra to homeless shelters or to others who might need it.

So what changed?

The answer is that God changed us. We realized that our wealth was not given to us for us to keep. It was intended for us to use for the benefit of God's kingdom. We are to be stewards, taking care of the Lord's things and giving others their portion. In Matthew 25:14-30, Jesus tells us about a ruler who gave his servants certain sums of money and all but one used that money for his master's benefit. We read this as God is our ruler and we are each given something for our master's benefit. With what we have we are supposed to help others and expand the kingdom of God. We use to be like the man who buried his master's money in the ground where it benefited no one. All we had was for us and it was of no benefit to anyone. But then we became like the others in the parable. We used our money to the benefit of our Master, by helping others and showing them the love of Christ.

God will provide all of our needs; “according to his riches in glory” (Philippians 4:19).

And he said unto his disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on.

The life is more than meat, and the body *is more* than raiment.

Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls?

And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit?

If ye then be not able *to do that thing which is* least, why take ye thought for the rest?

Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, *that* Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

If God so clothe the grass, which is to day in the field, and to morrow is cast into the oven; how much more *will he clothe* you, O ye of little faith?

And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind.

For all these *things* do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these *things*.

But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these *things* shall be added unto you.

Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth.

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Luke 12:22-34

Jesus tells us to sell what we have and give alms to the poor. He said further woe to the rich, and blessed are the poor. We've realized that it truly is more of a blessing to give rather than to receive. And it is better to share wealth than to keep it for ourselves. When we were wealthy everyone wanted something from us, but no one really wanted us as real friends. No one understood us, and everyone we did know only talked about themselves and things, even the religious people we knew many were only concerned with worldly wealth. So many false preachers today teach that Jesus is like some kind of genie and His purpose is to serve them. Their teaching is almost as if saying; rub the Bible for good luck and every time Jesus will pop out and grant you three wishes, but they are wrong. We are the servants, and "We are unprofitable servants: we

have done *that* which was our duty to do”, Luke 17:10. No man is greater than his master. Jesus was poor, in fact Jesus was homeless, we’re not saying that we should be homeless, but we are saying that we should live as simply as possible and be prepared for whatever God permits in our lives.

The disciple is not above his master: but every one *that is* perfect shall be as his master.

Luke 6:40

And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air *have* nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay *his* head.

Matthew 8:20

And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air *have* nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay *his* head.

Luke 9:58

And in the day time he was teaching in the temple; and at night he went out, and abode in the mount that is called *the mount* of Olives.

Luke 21:37

When Jesus had spoken these *words*, he went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron, where was a garden, into which he entered, and his disciples.

And Judas also, which betrayed him, knew the place: for Jesus oftentimes resorted thither with his disciples.

John 18:1-2

Jesus never commended those who chased after worldly wealth; in fact He always condemned them. When you have great wealth, or chase after wealth, it's very easy to depend on it and place it above others and above God. Placing things above God and other people is a sin, and chasing the lusts and desires of the flesh are sinful acts that lead to Hell just as much as murder, adultery, fornication, idolatry, witchcraft or any other sin. All sin is sin, and all sin will be punished, lest ye repent and be born again! And that is what changed for us.

Part Seven

When We Enter into That Rest

We will all one day stand before God and be judged, referring to the judgment the Bible tells us that:

...the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is *the* book of life: and the dead were judged out of those *things* which were written in the books, according to their works.

Revelation 20:12

The books that will be opened on the day we stand before God will be the Law (the Bible), which everyone in the world will be judged by and perhaps also a book recording all our sinful deeds, which would show how we failed in keeping the Law. Then God will look in that book of life to see if our name is written there.

And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

Revelation 20:15

The book of life is God's record of those who really belong to Him, through Jesus Christ.

Those of us in that book will be pardoned for all our sins. We will not be judged, because those of us who belong to Jesus are under grace, but those who do not belong to Jesus are still under the Law.

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.

Romans 8:1-2

Those of us written in the book of life will enter into God's eternal kingdom, or Heaven as it's so often called. The way to get your name written in the book of life is to become "born again". Jesus said in John 3:3 "... Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God". So now we must ask what does being born again mean?

Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.

For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.

For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, *even* our faith.

Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?

1 John 5:1-5

Simply put you must believe that Jesus is the Christ, the one who came to forgive your sins, and you need to love other people and show it, and you need to love God and show it, and you need to love God's Commandments and show it. You need to keep His Commandments because you love Him, keep them because you want to, not because you have to. Repent of your sins and sin no more, overcome your sins and be separate from sinful things and things that might tempt you to sin.

Being born again is realizing that you are a sinner, then accepting Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. And turning away from your sins and realizing that you have been forgiven and you now have eternal life through Jesus Christ.

Once you are born again, you will go to heaven, but you need to live right. Do not turn away from God and do not give up. Lynn and I both know that we will go to Heaven when we die. We know this because we believe what Jesus said and we accept His Words. We encourage you, if you don't know God then seek Him. Repent, change your

ways, and become born again. Be involved in a True church, and be baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost to show your faith outwardly. Enter into God's Covenant through Jesus Christ which is a free gift and the only way to Heaven.

And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

He that hath the Son hath life; *and* he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

1 John 5:11-12

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

John 3:16-18

But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.

John 20:31

But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:8

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God:

Not of works, lest any man should boast.

Ephesians 2:8-9

But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, *even* to them that believe on his name:

John 1:12