A close-up, high-contrast photograph of a woman's eye. The eye is looking down, and a single, large, clear tear is falling from the lower eyelid. The skin around the eye is pale, and the eyelashes are dark and slightly blurred. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light color.

AS SHE SLEEPS

The story of a woman
who found strength in the
midst of adversity

RANDALL J. BREWER



AS SHE SLEEPS

RANDALL J. BREWER

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Dedication



Virginia Caroline Sookram
1920 – 1986

My beloved mother and
guide. You still are the
door into my future and
my exit from the past.

-Anne Marie

FOREWORD

WALKING ON BROKEN GLASS

This biography of Anne Marie Brewer is not about the national or international statistics on abuse. It's not about the cruelty of some husbands or men in general. And it's not a book advocating justice for the millions of women worldwide that are physically and emotionally abused daily. It's about the survival of one woman who had to walk on broken glass daily, because there was nowhere else to walk.

In today's world, we are surrounded by heroes. Men and women returning from war; superstars from the gridiron to



the wooden courts. Men and women in civil service to us in our local communities who risk their lives several times each day, because they chose to.

But who raises the flag of recognition to those who have no choice but to walk on

broken glass everyday?

Sadly, most of us today would say that we wouldn't tolerate the abuse so many women are experiencing this very moment as you read this book. What would you do? There's no phone, no car, no ability to leave and take your children with you, because there are no friends or neighbors to offer you safe harbor; your family lives in a foreign country, and you have no access to money.

This is the story of Anne Marie Brewer, a woman who is my hero. She is a survivor and I am proud to call her my friend.

Paul Baker,

Publisher and friend of Anne Marie and Randall J. Brewer

INTRODUCTION

by Randall J. Brewer

Right now as I write these words, my beloved wife is in bed resting peacefully. I love watching her sleep. She lays on her stomach and one foot is always crossed over the other. I can see the outline of her beautiful body through the covers and the pillow is indented with the form of her soft and gorgeous face. Her shiny black hair covers a portion of her face and sometimes her breathing causes it to look like it's blowing in the wind on a cool summer evening.

Here lies the woman I love. This is my wife, the one person I will always be committed to. Inside of me is the desire to lay down beside her. I want to feel the warmth of her body next to mine. I want to hold her in my arms to let her know the depth of my love for her. I want her to know that I care. Inside my arms I want her to feel a sense of security, a knowing in her heart that everything will be all right. I want her to have the assurance that our union was created in the heart of God and that He has a mighty work planned for our lives.

In my heart I know that His greatest work was the day He joined the two of us together. Even now as I watch her sleep, I can see her walking up that aisle to join me in holy matrimony. She looks just as beautiful now as she did then. More so. Nobody can match the beauty of this woman. Nobody! I find myself stepping closer to her on the bed, when I notice an opened Bible laying on the night stand. No wonder she looks so peaceful. She ended her day in the presence of the Lord, and His Word will be the first thing she sees when she wakes up. Oh, how I love this woman! Anne Marie Brewer. My wife. Mrs. Randall J. Brewer.

Tears of joy and thanksgiving swell up in my eyes as I bend over and whisper in her ear, "I am my beloved's and my

beloved is mine.” Suddenly her eyes open and she asks me why I am crying. “I’m in love,” I tell her. “Me too,” she responds as she pulls the blanket up to her neck and softly drifts back to sleep. I step back thinking what a blessed man I am. My wife loves me and that is all I need to know to make it through the day.

As I turn to leave I look back at her one more time. “Baby,” I whisper, “I love you and I’ll be here for you when you wake up.” Somehow I think she knows that as I watch her continue her peaceful slumber. “Sleep well, my dear. You deserve it.” Slowly and quietly I thank the Lord for the greatest gift of all, a wonderful God-fearing wife sent from above. She always has been, and always will be, my wife, my friend, my hero.

This is her story.



“Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.

It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrow; For so He gives His beloved sleep”

Ps. 127:1,2.

“When you lie down, you will lie down and your sleep will be sweet” Prov. 3:24.

For Such a Time as This

I almost wish this story was about me, because then I'd have an easy time finding words to describe a plain and simple guy such as myself. But Anne Marie is different. Oh, is she ever. Anne is the type of individual that comes along once in a lifetime and would give any gifted writer fits as they faced the challenge of finding the right words to describe such a unique person.

Former heavyweight champion Floyd Patterson once responded when reminded that he got knocked down more than any other former champion, "That's true, but I also got up more than any other champion."

In a nutshell, that describes the life of my beloved wife. Four car crashes, a miscarriage, a near death experience with diabetes, arthritis, convulsive seizures, a surgical operation, broken bones, house burglarized, raped, and repeatedly beaten black and blue; thrown in jail for loving her children; victim of adultery and divorce; abused physically, emotionally, verbally; and abandoned by family and friends alike.

This does not sound like a very impressive listing of experiences in the resume of life, but such is the history of this amazing woman. The enemy has brought hardship after grueling hardship into her life, but each and every time she has found the strength and tenacity to get back on her feet and continue forward in her quest to please her Lord.

You can never tell by looking at her all that she's been through. She is so full of life and the joy of the Lord radiates out of her. She makes all those who come in contact with her believe that life isn't so bad. You just feel better about yourself by being with her but for a few moments. She truly is a remarkable woman who has found favor in the eyes of God and gained strength through adversity.

This is not to say her life has been peaches and cream. Far from it. She has been to hell and back more times than you can count. The key to her story is that she did come back. She walked through the valley of the shadow of death and came out victorious on the other side. She has been through the fire but when the smoke cleared, Anne Marie was always standing. She may be battered. She may be bruised. Yes, you can tell she's been in a battle. Many of them. But Praise Jesus, she is always standing!

The apostle Paul said it best in 2 Cor. 4:8,9, "We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed." The enemy just cannot keep this lady down, and her example of steadfast endurance has been an inspiration to me since the first day I met her. Like the radiant colors of a rainbow, Anne has brought color into my black and white world and she is by far the strongest, most endurable person I know.

The times I have struggled and needed somebody to lean on, Anne Marie was always there for me. She didn't cave in. She didn't crumble. She carried the burden as I sought the Lord to get my strength back and regain the knowledge of who I was in Christ. Truly she personifies what it means to be a warrior for Christ. She is a virtuous woman and "strength and honor are her

clothing”^{Prov. 31:25}. It is my heartfelt prayer that her example will be an inspiration to you as well.

On May 26, 1961 a terrible blow was rendered to the kingdom of darkness for it was on this day that Anne Marie was born into this world. You see, Anne has a unique God-given gift of exhortation where she makes all people feel good about themselves and who they are in Christ. What makes this gift so dangerous to the enemy is that he knows a person cannot fulfill God’s greatest command to walk in love unless they first learn to love themselves^{Rom. 13:9}.

Anne has a way about her that, after talking with her but for a few moments, you begin to feel special about yourself, and that life and all its hardships really aren’t so bad after all. You get encouraged to go forward and face life head-on. Her bright smile and the twinkle in her eye, coupled with wisdom gathered after years of experience and hard-fought battles, will lift you up from the valley of depression and discouragement and help set your feet on the solid rock of Jesus Christ.

My advice to anybody who is hurting is “Go talk to Anne Marie.” You can share with her the darkest secrets of your life, along with all your faults and shortcomings, and walk away not feeling condemned but uplifted, and that in the end everything will turn out in your favor. She is a messenger of hope who builds within your innermost being a confident reassurance that God truly is on your side and that “all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose”^{Rom. 8:28}.

I have seen Anne minister to others while she herself was engaged in a tough battle, and by listening to her nobody could tell what was happening behind the scenes. It is true that the best

way to get victory over your own battles is to reach out and help somebody else win theirs and Anne does this to perfection. Eph. 6:8 says, “What you make happen for others, God will make happen for you.”

Anne really does care about others, more than she cares about herself, and this is what being a follower of Christ is all about. As a result of this special anointing everybody loves Anne and has a deep desire to be around her because the spark of joy that radiates out of her has a way of rubbing off on people. I know that when I am down or in the midst of a struggle there is nobody I would rather be around than my beloved wife. The good news about all this is that, when people like you, they’ll listen to what you have to say and this opens the door for Anne to be used mightily by the Heavenly Father.

Paul write in 2 Tim. 2:20,21, “But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, prepared for every good work.” The willingness to serve is the mark of spiritual greatness.

To be a servant, Jesus said we must humble ourselves as a little child. It means to take your authority, power, and independence and yield them to another. The humble man has no plans, programs, or ideas of his own. He simply adopts with all his heart the plans and goals of the one to whom he is submitted. In exchange for all this, the servants of God become the happiest people in the world. No wonder there is a glow round about Anne that light up the world wherever she goes.

A golden vessel contains an abundance of the life of God that can be poured out into the lives of others, whereas an

earthen vessel of wood and clay will contain very little of this life. A product is useless as long as it sits on a shelf and many believers are content to sit back and do nothing for God. It has been estimated that ten percent of believers do ninety percent of the work.

What the body of Christ needs are more golden vessels and Anne Marie is one of the best. Why else would the enemy begin such an endless onslaught of attacks on this virtuous handmaiden who is so loved by God and all those who love her? She has fallen and been knocked down countless times, but each and every time she has clawed her way back to her feet to continue her quest to serve her Lord. Most definitely, this woman has the heart of a champion.

Ever since the Garden of Eden, when God gave man dominion over the earth, He has chosen to use people to work with Him to get His will and purpose fulfilled on the planet. He needs faithful servants who will cling to the call and help manifest His presence in the world today. Being born is “the act of coming into life,” and God, in His infinite wisdom, chose to place a special anointing on the life of Anne Marie the moment she was conceived in her mother’s womb.

Truly, the touch of God is on her life and when she entered this world everybody knew she was special. God knew it. Her family knew it. And yes, the devil knew it. The end of the age is near and the enemy is raging an attack against all those who will rise up and do their part to bring about the end-time harvest before the great and glorious coming of the Lord.

For sure, Anne is a threat to the kingdom of darkness and she is in the cross hairs of the enemy. Like Queen Esther in the Old Testament, the same question can be asked of her, “yet who

knows whether you have come into the kingdom for such a time as this?” ^{Esther 4:14}. Most definitely, she has.



A Spiritual Tug-of-War

Anne Marie entered this life on the small island of Trinidad which, along with Tobago, is a country that consists of two islands in the West Indies. It lies in the Caribbean Sea near the northeast coast of South America. Trinidad, the larger island, is seven miles east of Venezuela and Tobago is about twenty miles northeast of Trinidad.

Over forty percent of the country's people have black ancestry and another forty percent are descendants from India. People of mixed European and black African ancestry, plus groups of Europeans and Chinese, form the rest of the population. English is the country's official language but French, Spanish, and Hindi are also spoken. The law requires all children to go to school for six years and almost all the adults can read and write.

Roman Catholics form the largest religious group on the island, followed by Hindus and Anglicans. Many people in the country play native musical instruments called "pans" which are made from empty oil drums. Trinidad is the home of a form of folk music called "calypso" and of the "limbo" dance.

Christopher Columbus claimed Trinidad for Spain in 1498. Arawak and Carib Indians then lived there. The Spaniards set up a permanent settlement on the island in 1592, but population did not begin to grow rapidly until 1783. That year Spain offered land grants on Trinidad to any Roman Catholic settlers willing to develop the island's economy. Many planters

of French ancestry then went there from Haiti and other nearby islands. They established thriving sugar cane plantations and the island prospered.

The British captured Trinidad in 1797 and ruled it for over 150 years. In 1632 the Dutch settled on Tobago. Britain, France, and the Netherlands fought for possession of the island until 1814 when the British took control of it. Through the years, thousands of black slaves had been brought from Africa to work on the island's plantations. Labor shortage occurred after Britain abolished slavery in 1833 and many workers were brought in from India. In 1889 Trinidad and Tobago became one colony under British rule.

During the Great Depression of the 1930's the colony suffered severe economic setbacks. The people then began to demand a greater voice in their government. Britain allowed a gradual increase in self-government during the 1940's and 1950's and the colony became an independent nation in 1962, just one year after Anne Marie's birth.

Anne was the youngest of eight children born to her mother, who also had eight previous miscarriages, so her entrance into this world was a miracle all its own. Almost immediately after this princess of a lady began to breathe the breath of life, the devil rained turmoil down on her and the island on which she lived.

In the early 1970's black-power supporters protested against widespread unemployment and what they considered social and economic inequality in Trinidad and Tobago. Violent demonstrations broke out and the government twice declared a state of emergency. Racial tension eased in the mid-1970's but unemployment continued to be a major problem in the country.

The devil knows who his greatest enemies are and just as he tried to kill Jesus and Moses at an early age, in the midst of this social unrest did he set his sights on a young girl named Anne Marie. At the age of one she fell into a swimming pool and nearly drowned. Anne's three year old brother saw the top of her head floating on the water's surface and ran to get their father who came and rescued her.

At three Anne was on the second story of a huge concrete house when she wandered out onto the porch and climbed over the fence-like banister. She fell onto the concrete landing where a broken bone in her arm pierced through her skin. Her older brother pushed the bone back in place and she was quickly rushed to the hospital.

Several more childhood injuries followed when, as a tomboy, Anne fell out of trees, sliced her arm open while sliding down the hood of an old abandoned car, and ripped a toenail off while seesawing with a sibling. Her father was a veterinarian, and once on a farm, the children were mocking some bulls and water buffaloes. The huge creatures began to charge the youngsters and as Anne ran away she tripped and fell on her wrist which ended up broken.

Several physical ailments were unleashed on her as well. She had lots of incidents of high fever and she would lay on the ground and scream in pain when family members tried to pick her up.

At the age of ten, convulsive seizures began to plague her life two or three times a week and continued for the next ten years. Home remedies were used in an effort to help her and she'd wake up covered with oil and lemon juice and a spoon was in her mouth to prevent her from biting down on her tongue. All

her family could do was hold her and give her comfort.

Behind the scenes her Christian mother was offering up prayers as a covering of protection for her youngest daughter. Yes, mother Virginia Sookram knew her convulsing daughter ,whom she held so tightly in her loving arms, was special. She knew the hand of God was on her life and that great things would be done through her. Little did she know that the devil was not through with little Anne Marie.

One of the greatest tragedies in the world today is the lack of Godly mentors in the lives of young people, as they face head-on the trials of life. Single parent homes far outnumber the traditional home where a God-fearing father and mother raise their children to grow up and become all they were meant to be. Families such as those portrayed in the television series “The Waltons” and “Little House on the Prairie” are almost non-existent in the world today.

Real life today isn’t like that, and most young people are left to fend for themselves in a worldly system that is designed to destroy them. Presently we find the world of young people in the worst condition it’s ever been in and the root of this problem can be traced back to the fact that they have had no Godly mentors in their lives to train them in the way they should go.

Fortunately, Anne Marie did not have this tragic void in her life for the Lord blessed her with a mother who loved Him dearly. Virginia Sookram would be used to mentor little Anne, and be a Godly example to her throughout the early stages of her life. She would not have survived otherwise.

It is not always easy being the youngest child in a large family. As it was in the Biblical stories of Joseph and Benjamin, Anne Marie quickly became the apple of her father’s eye. This

turned into a nightmare more than a blessing. She was a love child since the day she was born, and was always being watched over and protected. While her siblings were out playing in the fields discovering who they were, or getting married and finding their place in the world, little Anne was forced to stay in a home that oftentimes felt like a prison to her.

Hard responsibilities were thrust upon her small shoulders as she was required to do all the cooking and cleaning around the house. Her heart grieved as she heard the laughter come forth from her brothers and sisters as they came inside the house and expressed themselves regarding the fun they were having.

There was no running water in her home so Anne and her next eldest brother had to walk every day to the water pipe a mile away and bring water back for the family. The roads were not blacktop but rather dried mud and the hardened tire tracks made for a rough journey as one child pulled the heavy wagon and the other tried to balance the barrel of water that sat in it. This was a very grueling experience and both children hoped they could get home without spilling too much water, so they wouldn't have to go back and get more.

This water pipe was also where they did their laundry and young Anne Marie spent hours upon hours beating dirty clothes against an old, used washboard. Her knuckles ached continually as she dreaded the long walk home, for who knew what awaited her there?

Anne's father was a heavy drinker and oftentimes he'd be passed out and she would be forced to clean him up. This was no way for a child to be brought up. Anne Marie's pure and innocent little heart was torn in two as it cried out for the freedom to let the child in her come out. All she wanted was to

express herself and be normal like other children her age. This was not to be, and her freedom to be a child was mercilessly stolen from her.

The years of youth quickly passed her by, and with an emptiness in her heart she was forced to watch life from the sidelines. Slowly she began to close up on the inside as she surrendered any hope of having a normal childhood. And, to make matters worse, she became the target of a spiritual tug-of-war between her Hindu father and Christian mother. They fought for possession of her soul.



The Devil Never Plays Fair

There are probably no two beliefs in the world that are more opposite from one another than Christianity and Hinduism. The fundamental truths that form the Christian faith is a collection of sixty-six books known as the Holy Bible. On the other hand, Hinduism has no single book that is the source of its doctrine, although it has many sacred writings, all of which contribute to it's fundamental beliefs.

Early Hindus worshipped gods that represented powers in nature, such rain and the sun. Gradually some Hindus came to believe that though divinities appear in separate forms, these forms are of one universal spirit called "Brahman." These Hindus believe many divinities make up "Brahman." The most important ones are Brahma, the creator of the universe; Vishnu, its preserver; and Shiva, its destroyer.

According to Hindu doctrine, animals as well as human beings have souls. Cows are sacred but Hindus also revere monkeys, snakes, and other animals. Hinduism teaches that the soul never dies and says man earns heaven through devotion, meditation, good works, and self-control. If he fails to succeed he may try again in a reincarnated form. The soul may be reborn in an animal or in a human being, but Hindu doctrine is not clear on this point. It's all based on how well you performed in your previous life and will continue on for as long as it takes you to be good enough to earn a place in heaven. All their lives a Hindu

asks, “Am I good enough?” but they won’t know until they open their eyes in the next life, because there are no guarantees.

The Bible, however, is quite clear on this point. It says you are not good enough to earn heaven on your own merit. Rom. 3:23 says. “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” No one can earn heaven by performing good works or by getting better in their daily conduct. Man obtains heaven, as well as the best of this life, through a Savior, Jesus Christ. People must believe in their heart and confess with their mouth that Jesus is Lord, in order to receive eternal salvation. Jesus boldly summed it up when He said in John 14:6, **“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”**

Many observances of Hinduism take place in the home. Most homes have a shrine devoted to a divinity chosen by the family. A number of important ceremonies are performed at home, including those where children become members of the Hindu community. This happened to Anne Marie, and at the tender age of six she was christened a Hindu. Of course, Anne was too young to know what was going on. This ceremony was more for her father’s sake than her own. Still, every person believes something about God and the next life whether they admit it or not. You can’t take the fifth amendment when it comes to eternal matters.

As time began to add years to Anne’s life, she was ripped apart on the inside as she desperately tried to please both her parents whom she so dearly loved. One day she would go to a candle-lighting ceremony with her father, and the next she’d be dressing up in a pretty dress to go to a Christian church with her mother. Her little heart was struggling to know what was real.

What should she believe? Would she spend eternity in heaven with the God her mother believed in or would she be eating grass with her father as a reincarnated cow off in some field someplace?

Her head was spinning with unanswered questions. Her only hope of knowing the truth was to observe closely the conduct of both her parents. All parents have the responsibility to set the example and mentor their children. Maybe, just maybe, their words and their actions would reveal what was real and what was not.

As is the case with most young girls, Anne was especially close to her mother. Not all mothers are good mentors but Virginia Sookram was one of the best. Indeed, she was the spiritual patriot of the family. She knew her Bible and the plan God had for her children's lives. She built a legacy of being a woman who loved Jesus, and her mission in life was to help her children grow into the image of Christ, and become all they were meant to be. She was a walking, living prophecy of their future. She knew where they were at and where they needed to be. For Anne Marie, her mother became the door into her future, the exit from the past. Virginia's mission, of course, would not be fulfilled without any opposition from the enemy.

Trapped in a culture where couples stayed together no matter what, Virginia suffered horrendous physical abuse at the hands of her husband. Satan mounted an all out assault against this remarkable woman, but little did he know that she had a sword in one hand and a shield in the other. What the enemy meant for evil, God meant for good. What these beatings did was turn Virginia Sookram into a prayer warrior for Christ.

Anne was a witness to many of these vicious attacks

and the scars they left on her innocent soul would haunt her for years to come. But through it all, her mother's example gave her a weapon that would defeat the enemy anytime, anywhere. Anne Marie learned from her mother that character is built and strength is found when you learn to trust Jesus in the midst of your adversity. She saw this over and over again throughout the early years of her life.

Anne saw her mother savagely beaten and, trembling with fear, would stand in awe as she watched this battered saint get on her knees and pray for the salvation of her tormentor. She watched this physically frail woman rise up in the spirit and become strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.

Anne's mentor burned an impression on her heart that the first thing you do in times of trouble is get down on your knees in prayer. Little did she know that, more than once in her future, she'd survive solely on this valuable lesson she learned from her saintly mother. For unbeknownst to her at this time, a man, just as abusive as her father, would one day enter her life and become her living nightmare.

But first, another lesson had to be learned.



The Heart of a Champion

AS Anne grew into the adolescent years of her life, there was still a void in her heart that needed to be filled. Young adulthood and the world beyond would soon be knocking at her door. The high rate of suicides among young people is proof positive that the journey into the sometimes unknown world of adulthood can be most overbearing if one is required to face it alone.

The truth is we need help. We need an advocate and a counselor to lead us and guide us in the way we should go. We need a friend who sticks closer than a brother, one who will never leave us or forsake us. This person will forever stand by our side and be for us an ever present help in time of need. Virginia Sookram knew who this person was.

The time when Anne would be required to make decisions on her, own was about to be thrust upon her, but still the number one question in her life remained to be answered. Whom and what would she believe? Should she follow in the way of Hinduism or Christianity? Would Brahma be her master and guide or the Lord Jesus Christ?

Up until now Anne's mother had been the most influential person in her life. The question of what to believe was being answered by the loving, caring actions of this saintly woman.

Not only did Virginia teach her children with words, but

also by example. She was a woman who loved Jesus and proved it by the generous way she treated others. She prayed often and when knocked down, she'd always get back on her feet and kept going forward in her walk with the Lord. Too much was at stake for her to stay down. She knew she had to be there for her children and she was.

Anne Marie was almost to the point in life where she would have to decide for herself which divine belief to cling to. There was, however, one thing she knew for sure. Her mother had a deep passion for her God that her father didn't have for his. And it was this lesson of passion that would be the deciding factor when the time came for this important decision to be made.

Ps. 100:2 tells us to "serve the Lord with gladness." There is so little we can do for God if we're not happy. Sad to say, too many people let circumstances determine whether or not they get happy. The key is to be happy, no matter what's going on around you. In spite of all the pain she suffered, Virginia had determined in her heart to live a happy life. This, along with her deep passion for the Lord, is what qualified her to be a servant of God and a mentor to her children.

You simply cannot serve God properly with a frown on your face. You must serve Him with love, joy, commitment, and, most of all, with passion. Virginia was the type of person who put her whole heart into everything she did for God and her family. She served God and others with spirit, soul, and body.

A day never went by when she didn't diligently seek out some way to bless her Lord and show His love to other people. She didn't wait for the opportunity to come to her. She went out and created the opportunity. In other words, she loved on purpose

and it was the force of passion that gave her the motivation and the energy to go on.

Virginia Sookram had the heart of a champion.

- *When knocked down, it was passion that caused her to pick herself up from off the floor.*
- *It was passion that drove her forward.*
- *It was passion that caused her to never give up.*
- *Passion makes the most of every situation.*
- *Passion finds a way when there is no way.*
- *It was passion that caused Jesus to overcome the trial He faced in the garden of Gethsemane.*
- *It was passion that led Him to the cross.*
- *Passion gives you the motivation to accomplish those things that God gives you to do.*

Heb. 12:2,3 says, “look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him Who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.”

This is what Virginia did. She considered Jesus and this is called passion. It has been said that God isn't looking for **ability**, but **availability**. If you're willing and available to be used by God, if you've got joy in your heart and a bounce in your step, then most assuredly God will do “exceedingly, abundantly above what we can ask or think” Eph. 3:20.

Yes, passion always goes forward and never, *never* gives

up. It was this passion in her mother's heart that left the greatest imprint on the life of Anne Marie. Because of it, another soul was about to be added to the kingdom of God.

It is no secret that the devil does not fight fair. What else would you expect from a creature such as he? That sly snake will do anything and everything he can to interrupt and prevent the will of God from being fulfilled in your life. That's all he does. He comes to kill, steal, and destroy ^{John 10:10}. He's out to get you. Period! And if he can't persuade you to come over to his side, he'll then try to hinder your walk with the Lord and render you ineffective in the work you do for the kingdom of God.

The end of time as we know it is drawing near and the trials of life are worse today than they've ever been. The devil knows he doesn't have much time left, so his efforts to destroy the works of God and His people have been increased to a higher level unknown to man up until this time.

Everybody knew there was something special about Anne Marie, and the time would soon come when she would decide for herself who her Lord would be. Instinctively, the devil set a plan in motion that would interrupt God's plan for her life, seeking to bring her down. Again.

All during the early years of her life Anne was a protected shut-in, and her only escape from the confines of her home was school. She didn't know how to relate to the other children and often sat by herself until coaxed to play. Once she entered into their world, the little girl inside of her came out and Anne loved the sense of freedom this gave her. She became a type of tomboy and when going to and from school, would go exploring with her brothers. She was amazed at the immense size of the Catholic churches she saw and all the other things she discovered on this

small tropical island. She was in a whole new world and she loved it.

Of course, school is not all fun and games and Anne struggled in her studies. She didn't like this aspect of school, for she was unable to catch on to what was being taught. All schools have their hecklers and name-callers, and in time Anne became a victim of their hostility and spite. The devil used these rude and insensitive classmates to chip away at the esteem and self-worth her mother so effortlessly tried to bestow upon her.

In time, the freedom Anne so dearly loved gave way to the need of security she found only at her mother's side. All she wanted to do now was stay at home, because this is all she had ever known. What once felt like a prison to her had now become a haven of love and security. She no longer wanted to go to school, and at the tender age of 14, while still in the 9th grade, her father gave his approval for her to quit.

Her mother disapproved of this decision because she knew how important a good education was. But daddy had spoken. The decision had already been made and there was nothing she could do about it. She did, however, do the next best thing. While Anne stayed home to clean and take care of her nieces and nephews, Virginia made arrangements to send her to a sewing school and a cooking school. Virginia was a mother who knew what her children needed most and she devoted her entire life giving it to them. Anne was growing up and Virginia knew she couldn't stay home forever.

To get her babies to fly, a mama eagle oftentimes is forced to push them out of the nest. Likewise, in an act totally out of character with any thing he had previously done, Anne's father began to send her away to stay with other relatives for long

periods of time. Anne did not understand why her father was doing this and she became confused and bewildered. Insecurity set in and all Anne wanted was to be by her mother's side.

There was just a different spirit in her mother that wasn't there in the life of her aunts and uncles. She didn't feel loved by these people and often felt she was being used because of all the work she was forced to do in their homes.

One time she was made to stay with the elderly mother of her father's boss. She did various chores while there, and once when she was painting the upper trim of the woman's house, the ladder she was on toppled over backwards and Anne fell hard onto the ground below. Luckily all that happened was that the wind was knocked out of her. More than that, her feelings were jarred with the bondage she felt in the life she was being forced to live.

Once again, Anne felt imprisoned in a world where there was no escape. Her heart cried out for the freedom to make those decisions that would allow her to be herself without being made to feel like a puppet on a string. Interesting enough, it was this need for freedom that would be the bait the devil would use to draw her into a relationship that was designed to destroy her and interrupt God's plan for her life.



Lovers of Themselves

The time had come for Anne to enter the real world and her father got her a job at a cola bottling plant called “Solo” where he worked as a guard and maintenance worker. Anne was allowed to move back home at this time and was overcome with eager anticipation as the door to her future flung open before her very eyes. Like an adventurous explorer she was, about to boldly go where she had not gone before.

With her long hair covered by a protective cloth and wearing a white gown she became a bottle inspector and a box maker. The job was not hard for her, because she had been a hard worker all her life. She worked a variety of shifts, and for the first time in her life, felt independent. She was beginning to discover who she was, and slowly began to come out of that shell she would often run to in order to escape from the hard realities of life.

Because of her bright personality, everybody was attracted to Anne and she made a lot of friends at her new job. Indeed, she was having more fun than at any other time in her life.

She got lots of attention and was made to feel special. Men, married and single alike, were especially drawn to her exceptional beauty and youthful innocence. Compliments came as fast as they could speak them. They began giving her gifts and, because where the mind goes the man follows, seemed to

want more from Anne than just her friendship or merely having her as a coworker.

The offers came and while she loved the attention, in the back of her mind she was reluctant to get involved because she feared how her protective father would respond. Still, she felt like she was on top of the world. Unfortunately, that world would soon come crashing down.

There are two types of people in the world: takers and receivers. A receiver is a person who accepts what's being offered with the intent of turning around and blessing another person in return. Matt. 10:8b says, "Freely you have received, freely give." A taker, on the other hand, is selfish, and like a bloodthirsty shark will prey on the helpless and lay hold of whatever will benefit them and them alone. They have no regard for the well being of others.

A taker is a thief who comes to kill, steal, and destroy John 10:10. In 2 Tim. 3:2-5 the apostle Paul gives a detailed description of their ungodly behavior, "For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying it's power. And from such people turn away!"

These professional takers are the type of people the devil uses most in efforts to interrupt the plan of God in one's life. With the exception of her God-fearing mother, the early years of Anne's life was dominated by the will and actions of a taker. Before long another taker would enter her life.

For nearly two years Anne worked at the Solo bottling

plant and during this time she turned into a young adult. She was growing up and inevitably lost the distinctive role of being daddy's little girl. Slowly but surely her father loosened his grip on Anne's life and began to look to his grandchildren to compensate for his loss. They were becoming the apple of his eye, and this hindered his judgment for Anne's welfare when she needed it most.

At work a series of mechanical problems limited the flow of production in Anne's department, so a highly skilled mechanic from America was brought in to help resolve the technical aspects of the situation. When he arrived his long sideburns and cowboy boots made him appear like a renegade from the American west. He was tall and slender but no, he wasn't a cowboy. Instead, he was a taker to the highest degree.

It didn't take long for this American's roaming eyes to lock onto Anne whose stunning beauty captivated his greedy, lustful mind. A hypnotic stare burned the image of this young West Indian maiden onto his selfish soul and he decided then and there that he wanted her for his own.

In America, a man is often judged by the beauty of the woman at his side and he knew having Anne would cause him to receive high praises from whoever saw the two of them together. He didn't care about Anne, her well-being, her future, or anything else that concerned her. All he cared about was himself, and he set in motion a plan to find a way for her to return to the states with him. This pursuit would throw God's plan for Anne's early years into a tailspin, and brought into her life nothing but pain and despair.

In no time at all Bill, the 29 year old mechanic from America, became aggressively persistent in the pursuit of his

prey. He asked what Anne's name was and shortly thereafter was introduced to her father from whom he got permission to meet and date his youngest daughter. Even before meeting the man Anne was told that the American wanted to marry her. Anne was scared and didn't want him to visit her at her home. What she wanted was to still be daddy's little girl. He came anyway and poured on the charm and acted like a real gentleman. Of course, even the devil transforms himself into an angel of light ^{2 Cor. 11:14}.

All of Anne's family took a liking to Bill, and an older sister even allowed him to stay in a room at her house while he was on the island working at the plant. He traveled back and forth between the United States and Trinidad and when he went home he would call Anne at work in an effort to win her over. He was indeed very, very persistent. He even claimed to be a Christian, but his actions said otherwise.

Bill blatantly and unashamedly lived for himself and the Lord's example of love and giving was nowhere to be found in his life. Shortly thereafter his efforts paid off when a frightened Anne, encouraged by her father, went out for dinner with him. He seemed nice enough and even claimed that he loved her. Inside her heart Anne didn't know what to feel or believe.

This was all new to Anne and everything was happening so quickly. Yes, other men from the island showed an interest in her but none so aggressively as Bill. He was grown and seemed much older when compared to the youthfulness of Anne's 18 years. He did have a good job and in his favor he had one more thing. He wanted to take Anne to America, and in his bag of tricks was the offer of freedom that she so desperately craved. This was the bait on the hook of his devilish advances.

Anne knew nothing about love and courtship, but when

her father told her to marry the man, she figured this was how it was supposed to be. And so, in the height of youthful innocence, she gave in and agreed to marry the man from America. Not long after this Anne and her family met Bill at the airport and he placed an engagement ring on the finger of his young bride-to-be. Inside his egotistical mind he must have been thinking, “I’ve got her now.”

There is a price to pay for everything, and the price for love is pain. Love without pain and sacrifice is non-existent, but the devil tries to draw people into his web of pain and deceit by offering them a relationship that appears to be all peaches and cream. Those who don’t know better or can’t handle pain, more times than not– take the path of least resistance. Blindly they enter the snare of the enemy whose only intent is to destroy their very lives.

Anne was promised a good life by Bill, but it wouldn’t take long for her to realize how futile his words were. Time flew by faster than lightning and two months after their initial introduction, Anne Marie went to a courthouse and married the American known as the man with the cowboy boots. This was not a union Anne entered into eagerly.

This marriage was more or less arranged by Bill and her father and Anne basically went along for the ride. She was confused and greatly embarrassed. Feeling ashamed and humiliated, she entered into a relationship from which she has yet to fully recover.

Bill and Anne stayed in Trinidad for a week and then left for the United States. Anne didn’t know what to expect, and mixed emotions caused her to feel excited one day and fearful the next. Never had she experienced anything like this before.

She was, however, married now and the hands of time could not be turned back. She was here in a new country, in a new culture, with a husband she barely knew. No longer could she go to her mother to receive the love and security every girl needs, no matter how old they are. In her heart she felt alone and little did she know the worse was yet to come. Thankfully, her mother was a woman of prayer and her God would not let her petitions go unanswered.

By now the devil was probably self-absorbed in satisfaction because another victim had been claimed and the plans of his greatest enemy had once again been interrupted. But then, as far as the devil was concerned, the unthinkable happened.

In a perverted, self-centered way, Bill did not want to get in trouble with God for being unequally yoked with a non-believer. It makes you wonder why he didn't think about this sooner when he was on the prowl. Anyway, two weeks after returning to America Bill led Anne in the prayer of salvation. He didn't care about Anne or the condition of her spirit and soul. No, Bill was a taker and he did this for his own benefit. After all, that's what takers do. Only his selfish desires prevented him from considering this in Trinidad. He had no regard for the will of God then, and he had no regard for it now.

Thankfully, Anne was sincere and with her mother's example burned into her heart, she accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as her personal Savior.

In heaven all the angels rejoiced and on the throne the Heavenly Father turned to Jesus at His right hand side and said with a wink and a smile, "We've got her now." Interestingly enough, the one person assigned by the enemy to bring about

the destruction of young Anne Marie was instead used by God to lead her into the Holy of Holies. On this day it was the devil's plans that were interrupted.



Life Banishes Darkness

Love is a many splendored thing, or so the song goes. Anne Marie could not honestly say she didn't love her new husband, because she thought she did. He said he loved her and at first acted like this was true. What was an inexperienced teenager from a far away tropical island supposed to do or think? She was trapped in a world she knew nothing about and each new day brought with it a journey into the unknown.

It did not take long, however, for turmoil to strike the home of newlyweds Bill and Anne Marie. Arguing and strife came often and the things Bill began to do to her brought confusion to Anne's already bewildered heart, as she wondered if this is what love was all about. The control and dominion he exercised over her fed his monster-sized ego as he began to treat her more like an animal than a human being.

Bill was an extremely jealous person and did not allow Anne to go anywhere. He could come and go as he pleased and did anything he wanted. He had no regards for the needs and desires of his young wife, and to Anne he became a liar, cheater, and manipulator.

This, however, was not the worst of it, for six months after their wedding the physical abuse began. Frequently Bill's rocklike fists found their mark on Anne's face. At times hand-shaped welts covered her body and black and blue marks

diminished the beauty of her soft, brown skin. One time, a well-aimed punch to the mouth damaged a nerve in Anne's upper root system and today one of her front teeth is darker than all the others. Every day it is a stark reminder of all the horror and pain she lived through. Still, she has one of the brightest smiles of anybody you'll ever meet.

Bill was very possessive of Anne and when she had no desire to fulfill his sexual lusts, he would brutally force himself on her. This he did repeatedly and Anne became a slave in her own house. She was in over her head, and whenever she expressed a desire to return home to Trinidad she would be locked out of her house for hours at a time.

Frightened and having no where to go and nobody to turn to, she would sit and think about her mother and all that she stood for. With tears running down her cheeks Anne longed to be with her again but more than that, she began to develop a longing to get to know her new Savior in a meaningful, more intimate way.

Anne remembered all the wonderful things her mother used to say about Jesus. She was always singing to her Lord, even when her children stood watch with a flashlight outside the family outhouse. No matter what hardship she went through, Virginia's love for Jesus never faltered. Like a mountain bursting up out of the earth, Jesus was bigger than life to this woman. She expected no less of herself than total commitment to Jesus. She persevered in the face of insurmountable adversity, but through it all she stood strong in her faith and in her love for Jesus.

Anne knew that if Jesus could give her mother the strength to endure and overcome her life of hardship and tribulation, then He would be there to help her as well. Thus began the journey

where Anne would rise up and follow in her mother's footsteps to become a living personification of 2 Cor. 12:10b which says, "For when I am weak, then I am strong."

More than anybody, Virginia Sookram knew what it was like to have God's plans interrupted. She was a humble yet strong little woman who lived her life on the field of battle. She built a legacy by knowing what to do when it appeared that the enemy was getting the upper hand. She trusted Jesus. She never gave up. She kept going forward in her spiritual walk. Micah 7:8 says, "Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; When I fall, I will arise; When I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me."

In Virginia's life the plans of God got interrupted, but never were they stopped. She was too strong for that. She lived her life knowing that a mature Christian is a praying Christian, who knows where their strength comes from. This was Virginia's greatest strength and this was what she passed on to all her children. This lesson Anne remembered well. She learned to put her trust in God no matter what the circumstances of life may bring.

Time rolled on as it always does and Anne found herself trying to make the best of a really bad situation. The good times were few and far in between as Bill's fanatical love for himself and auto racing overrode any concern or interest he had for his marriage. During this time, Bill's fists must have gone to flight school because they were always flying in the direction of Anne Marie. More times than not they found their mark.

They lived in a small apartment and in the first year of being together, Anne became pregnant with her first child. This gift from God raised Anne's awareness that there is more to life than her own problems, but six weeks into the pregnancy she

suffered a miscarriage.

The fighting continued and whenever they went out men would always stare at Anne and complimented her beauty. This only ignited the fire of Bill's jealous rage and again the freedom Anne so desperately craved was taken from her. She had no car to drive, no money to spend, and no phone to call her family in Trinidad whom she loved dearly.

One day Bill came home and announced that he had bought a two-family house, and the couple moved out of their apartment. A short time later Anne became pregnant again and less than a week before her 21st birthday she went into labor and asked to be taken to the hospital. Bill agreed to do so, but first made Anne cook him something to eat before they left. He was more concerned about what was in his own stomach than the baby that was in Anne's. Once again, Bill's needs and desires became top priority. Eventually they made it to the hospital and a short time later a baby son was born whom they named Michael.

Love is when you care for somebody more than you care for yourself. Motherhood created in Anne a love she had never known before and she made a commitment in her heart to never allow her child to feel unloved. Anne knew firsthand the joy of being loved and the pain of being rejected. She also knew that the God of love, Who now lived in her heart, would be there to help her and guide her and strengthen her along the way.

Her marriage to Bill continued on as it always had. There were a few good times and many, many bad times. Bill's changing moods confused Anne for she never knew what he was thinking. One day he would be a proud father and act like he loved his family and the next day he'd be angry and stressed out over the new responsibilities that were upon his shoulders. He

had a good job and plenty of money but his self-centeredness won out over any love or concern he had for his family. They cramped his style and Bill didn't like it. People can tell when they're not loved and since Bill rejected the love Anne tried to give him, she poured everything she had into her new son.

Bill continued his business dealings without Anne's knowledge of what he was doing, and soon informed her that he had sold their house and bought a trailer. They moved and Anne became pregnant with her second child, and when Michael was a year and a half old, he was given a baby sister to play with named Cheryl.

Anne could not contain the joy she felt and even Bill was excited for a moment of time. His feelings quickly changed, and from that time on always acted like he had something against his little daughter. Cheryl would be haunted by this rejection from that day forward, and to this day does not understand why her father feels the way he does.

Rejection was one thing Anne could relate to and she tried to compensate for her child's loss by pouring everything she had into their precious little lives. They grew extremely close and shared a bond that no abusive husband or father could break.



Joy Comes in the Morning

The fighting continued and nobody wanted to give an inch. Anne Marie would not budge on her family convictions and Bill would not budge on his self-centeredness. Anne was now a born-again believer, so she sought out a Christian counselor in hopes of finding help and direction on what she should do. She really didn't know what to do, where to turn, who to talk to. She was at the end of her rope. This counselor recommended that Anne and the children get involved in a local faith-filled church that was centered on the Word of God.

Anne followed this advise and it became the best thing she could have done. Her walk with the Lord took off from there. Her knowledge of God grew exceedingly and the closeness she felt to Him developed like never before. He was the answer she so desperately craved. As all good Christians do, Anne wanted to give something back so she got involved in the nursery, where for the next 14 years she would give of herself to all the newborns of this loving and caring generation.

Anne's heart was now centered on her children and the ministry she was involved in, and it came as no surprise when Bill one day announced that he had bought a house and once again they were moving. Anne had no say in the business matters of the family so, with her mind on spiritual matters, she packed up and moved. Little did she know that a surprise awaited her

there.

Anne once again became pregnant and gave birth to a baby girl they named Debbie. No longer was Anne a protected shut-in from Trinidad. She was now a full-time mother and great responsibilities were on her shoulders. Emotionally she had to carry the burden alone, for Bill was off in his own world and was not the type of man to give himself over to acts of kindness or feelings of emotion. Help, however, was on the way. A few months after Debbie was born Anne got word that her mother from Trinidad was coming for a visit. Anne leaped for joy.

Virginia and Anne were probably as close as any mother and daughter could be. You could not erase the smile on their faces when they met at the airport. Neither could Anne be happier, and the spirit in the heart of Virginia quickly engulfed their home. For the first time in a very long while Anne was at peace, and the joy radiating out of her mother lifted everybody's spirit.

Virginia cooked and played with her grandchildren. She talked about Jesus and reached out in love to all her neighbors. Virginia was the type of person who when she met somebody she acted like she knew them all her life. She would always want to get involved in hopes of finding a way to make their lives better. One time she even went outside in her bed clothes to help Bill when his car got stuck in the snow. All she wanted to do was help other people. This is what she lived for.

Her heart broke when she saw Bill and Anne fight and she always encouraged them to make peace and work things out. All she knew was hard times and she didn't want her loved ones to go through what she did.

Virginia knew that Jesus was the answer to any problem

you have. Her face was always glowing with the love of Jesus and she talked often with Anne over morning coffee. Virginia loved to go to church and made lots of friends when she got involved in a local ministry for seniors. She had a lot of health problems, and in recent times began mentioning a pain she was having in her hip. They said it was arthritis and Anne could relate to this, because she also started having joint pains ever since she had come to America.

The doctors said that a tick bite while camping may be the reason for Anne's pain. Still, the two of them couldn't be more happy. They wanted to make the most of their time together, because in the near future Virginia would have to return home to Trinidad.

The time for her departure came sooner than they would have liked and her farewell was a sad one. Hugs and kisses were shared by everyone and little did they know this would be the last time they would speak in person again.

Anne was riding high in her spirit over the positive effect her mother's visit had on her life, when three months later she received an emergency phone call from her oldest brother. The pain in her mother's hip was not arthritis but was instead bone cancer. This terrible disease quickly consumed her frail body and Virginia now lay in a coma. Her brother said she was dying and Anne needed to get down there as soon as possible. Her mother's final wish before losing consciousness was to see her baby daughter, Anne Marie.

It was a miracle that Bill allowed her to go home to Trinidad, but he would not do so without first giving her a "going away" present. Anne took her jewelry off in order to bathe and put some lotion on her skin. When Bill saw her wedding rings

on the table he accused Anne of planning to leave them home so she could go to Trinidad and see an old boyfriend from the bottling plant. His jealous fury burned white hot as he unleashed a physical pounding on Anne that was so severe it left her black and blue all over.

Two days later Anne was at her mother's bedside where she whispered into her ear, "Mom, I'm here. I love you." She kissed her mother whom she loved so dearly and for the next two days nobody slept. Anne was keeping watch at her mother's side when suddenly Virginia began to breathe quickly. Anne knew this was not normal, and moments later this saintly woman breathed her last and went home into the loving arms of Jesus.

Virginia's death was hard on everybody but none more so than Anne Marie. Her mother's life left an imprint on her heart that will never be taken away. She lived in the classroom of reality and will always be remembered as a woman of endurance. She had a courageous spirit, an emotional bravery that compelled her to never give up and rise above all of life's setbacks and heartbreaks.

Virginia lived a life filled with pain and hardship but she persevered when others would have quit. She had the heart of a champion and left a legacy by the way she lived and by the way she died. She left behind good and lasting memories in the hearts of those who knew her. Her children remember getting pulled out of bed by their ear every night in order to get on their knees and say the Lord's Prayer.

Nothing but good could be said about Virginia Caroline Sookram. In time her husband, seven of her children, and several grandchildren would give their lives to Christ and go on to serve Him in a mighty and powerful way. This was the legacy she left

behind. She will forever leave an impression on the hearts of those who knew her. Especially her children. Especially Anne Marie.

The Living Bible translates Ps. 30:1-6 in a way that describes Virginia's trip to the land of heavenly glory, "I will praise You, Lord, for You have saved me from my enemies. You refuse to let them triumph over me. O Lord my God, I pleaded with You, and You gave me my health again. You brought me back from the brink of the grave, from death itself, and here I am alive! Oh, sing to Him you saints of His; give thanks to His holy Name. His anger lasts a moment; His favor lasts for life. Weeping may go on all night, but in the morning there is joy. In my prosperity I said, 'This is forever; nothing can stop me now!'"

That's right, Virginia. Nothing can stop you now.



The Making of a Warrior

Anne returned home from Trinidad saddened by the loss of her mother, but at peace, because Virginia was now in a better place. She had won the final and ultimate victory and Anne knew Jesus welcomed her home with these words, “Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord” ^{Matt. 25:21}.

For all practical purposes, Anne was now on her own. Waiting for her were three children who needed her desperately and a husband whose world revolved around himself. Life would not be easy and Anne knew she would need help. With the memory of her mother and all she believed in and stood for still fresh in her heart, Anne knew her help could come from only One Source. She would fill the void in her heart caused by her mother’s passing away with an unconditional, total surrender to her Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, once said, “The greatness of a man’s power is in the measure of his surrender.” The act of surrender is when you say “yes” to God and “no” to yourself. Surrendered people trust God and obey Him unconditionally, even when what He tells you what to do and it does not seem logical or make any sense at all.

An example of total surrender is found in Luke 5:4,7 where after a night of failed fishing, Jesus told Peter to “**launch**

out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.”

Simon answered and said to Him, “Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net.” Peter trusted Jesus and obeyed Him nonetheless. As a result he caught so many fish that his boat began to sink. When you rely on God to work things out instead of trying to control the situation yourself, then you are surrendered to His will and purpose.

A man has the responsibility of fulfilling four roles for his wife and family:

1. *He is to be their friend,*
2. *Their warrior,*
3. *Their lover, and*
4. *Their king.*

To be successful he must reject passivity, accept responsibility, and lead courageously. To his credit, Bill had all the makings of a true warrior for Christ, but his self-centeredness turned him into a destroyer, an abuser of both himself and his family.

There is nothing worse than a man whose world doesn't go beyond himself, who lives his life without aim or purpose, whose life rises no further than the immediate. Bill ruled his domain, not as a serving king, but as a controlling dictator. He dominated those in his care with an iron fist, and his control was so severe that his children couldn't even take a bath in more than one inch of water. Gone was the freedom to live life as it was meant to be. Gone was the privilege to make their home a haven of love, rest, and security. Gone was the right to be a normal human being. Gone was life itself.

It was evident from the very beginning that the marriage of Bill and Anne Marie would not be a life long affair. Marriage is a give-and-take relationship where success only comes when both parties are willing to give more than they take. It is a sad but true commentary that many men have “Kleenex” relationships with their wives. They take them, use them, throw them away.

The time came when Bill took interest in another woman and informed Anne that he no longer wanted to be married to her. Because of the children and the culture she came from, Anne begged and pleaded for their marriage to be saved. For a season Bill made a mockery of Anne’s heartfelt efforts and even made up a list of “do’s and don’ts” that had to be followed religiously.

Anne did her best but it soon became clear that Bill had no interest in saving their marriage. What he wanted was to control and dominate, something he had done from the moment he first set eyes on Anne down in Trinidad. And he was good at it. Not to be found in his heart was the love, sacrifice, and hard work needed to make a marriage work.

Without a doubt Bill was in this marriage for himself and when he had milked everything out of it that was beneficial to him, he decided to turn tail and run. Somewhere out there was another victim for him to manipulate for his own selfish purpose.

When his treachery had run its course, Bill went to a lawyer and filed for divorce. Once again Anne’s world crashed down around her. She had three young children to care for and was a stranger in a country not her own. Her dear, sweet mother, the one person who meant the most to her, was now gone away to a better world. What was she to do? Where was she to turn? In her heart she knew the answer.

Where Bill ran into the arms of another woman, Anne Marie ran to the Lord in prayer. It was here, down on her knees, that Anne found strength in the midst of her adversity. Jesus Christ, the Creator of the universe, poured into the spirit of this remarkable woman the strength and endurance that was needed to overcome the hell-like consequences of what was sure to follow.

Divorces, like people, came in various shapes and sizes. This one was ugly. Very ugly. Bill pulled no punches and fired everything in his arsenal at his bewildered and frightened wife. She was standing on the Rock of her salvation, but her life was taking a terrible beating. Anne was once again catapulted into a world she knew nothing about. They didn't have divorces where Anne came from and she had no idea what her rights and entitlements were.

A woman lawyer from her church offered to represent Anne for free, but that did more harm than good. Passivity became a trademark of this lawyer and she was unassertive in her efforts to look out for the welfare of her client. Little or no work was put into Anne's case and this gave Bill the advantage as he sought to destroy and demoralize the mother of his children.

Like the devil, Bill was like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. The only thing Anne wanted was her three children and Bill went for the jugular when he tried to gain custody of them. Naturally, Bill and Anne Marie were separated at this time and the judge in this case did not want the children moving back and forth between parents. While he decided who would get custody of the children, the judge in an unprecedented move ordered that the children remain at home and it would be Bill and Anne who would move back and forth during times of

visitation.

Bill knew the love Anne had for her children and to bring further torment into her life, he applied for and received an order of protection issued against Anne. One day when Anne could take the pain and loneliness no longer, she made an effort to see the children while on Bill's watch. Bill quickly proceeded to have her arrested and Anne spent the next two days curled up like a ball in a cold jail cell. This was the pinnacle of hurt and pain.

Anne was incarcerated for the crime of loving her children and her wailing heart was unable to convince her that there was anything wrong with that. Sobbing tears gushed out of her and flowed like an opened dam as she was strip-searched and made to wonder if she would ever see her children again. Never had she experienced anything so degrading, and for a moment in time she knew how Jonah must have felt in the belly of the whale. It felt like seaweed was wrapped around her neck choking the life out of her.

The acid of despair ate away at her heart, or what was left of it. Demons swarmed around her like flies over a pile of garbage. Fear had a vise-like grip on her and she felt alone and helpless, abandoned by everyone and life itself. Little did she know that Jesus at one time had felt the very same way.

Ps. 22:1,11-21 records the agony Jesus went through as He hung naked on the cross, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, and from the words of My groaning? Be not far from Me, for trouble is near; for there is none to help. Many bulls have surrounded Me; strong bulls of Bashan have encircled Me. They gape at Me with their mouths, like a raging and roaring lion. I am poured out like

water, and all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; it has melted within Me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death. For dogs have surrounded Me; the congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet; I can count all My bones. They look and stare at me. They divide My garments among them; for My clothing they cast lots. But You, O Lord, be not far from Me; O My strength, hasten to help Me! Deliver Me from the sword, My precious life from the power of the dog. Save Me from the lion's mouth and from the horns of the wild oxen! You have answered Me.”

Sitting limp like a rag doll, Anne knew that all she could do now is trust Jesus, never give up, and keep going forward. It was then that Jesus, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, rose up on the inside of her and like Gideon, she became a mighty woman of valor. For fourteen years Satan showed Anne Marie what hate, self-centeredness, and bitterness was like. Now it was God's turn. He would lead two men into her life to show her what love, self-sacrifice, and compassion was all about. They would love her unconditionally, without reservation, without regret, without fear. Her life would be changed forever.



“Seek Me & Find Me.”

One of the greatest benefits of being a Christian is that, if life hasn't treated you fair, you can leave it all behind and begin again. There are times when you need to draw a line separating you from your past and make a quality decision to move forward in life with a new outlook based upon the truths revealed in the Word of God.

Deciding to make a fresh start in life is vital because your future won't be any different from your past until you forget about it and move on. The Message Bible says in Is. 43:18,19, “Forget about what's happened; don't keep going over old history. Be alert, be present. I'm about to do something new. It's bursting out! Don't you see it?”

The choices you make today determine the outcome of tomorrow, and Anne Marie knew she had an important decision to make. She could let the actions of Bill control and dominate her for the rest of her life, or she could get back on her feet and go forward with the plans God had for her future.

The words of Jer. 29:11,14a brought a ray of hope to her spirit, “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go pray to Me, and I will listen to You. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back from your captivity.”

The scars of Anne's hurt ran deep and she knew not from divine revelation, but from experience, that hurt not dealt with can damage you for the rest of your life. Some way, some how, she had to get the hurt out. Anne knew you don't drown by falling in the water. You drown by staying there.

Anne's journey to a new life got off to a good start when the judge in her divorce case awarded her custody of the three children. Anne's love for her children proved to be unwavering and the judge clearly saw through Bill's antics to appear to be a loving and caring father. You just can't hide what a cold and bitter heart will do to you.

With this battle won Anne knew she had to be strong because her children were now depending on her for their very existence. All divorces have a ripping effect, not only on the hearts of the couple involved, but sometimes even more on the children. Now was the time for Anne to rise up and take responsibility not only for her own life, but for her children as well.

The roles of provider and protector were thrust upon Anne's shoulders, and with an ever increasing faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, she dug both heels into the ground and began the long climb up the mountain of recovery. To her credit she did the only thing she knew to do: she went to church. The church offered rides to people caught in situations similar to Anne's, and every time the doors were opened she and the children were there. As a family, they'd stand side by side with their hands raised in the air giving praise to their King. When praise and worship were over, they'd go to the nursery and together as a four person team they'd care and watch over the little infants there.

They overcame their hurt by reaching out to help others and this bonded them together with a love that couldn't be shattered.

Slowly but surely Anne and her children were building a new life for themselves. Just when some progress was being made, another court appearance in Anne's divorce case would pull her down into a world of hurt and pain. Yes, she was saved and serving God with all her heart and soul, but still the hurt remained.

Anne quickly realized that the blood of Jesus doesn't give you amnesia and she could not pretend her pain did not exist. It did exist and it hurt. It hurt bad. As hard as she tried, she couldn't make the hurt go away. She was in a danger zone, because if not dealt with, hurt can make you bitter and resentful. Before long you become paralyzed and can't move forward in life. Hurt distorts your view of what life is all about. Hurt makes bad decisions and often you will lose the desire to fight off the attacks of the enemy. Being hurt is right where the devil wants you.

Almost always hurt leads to anger and anger can turn into depression. Both of these were knocking on the door of Anne's heart and she felt like she was becoming a prisoner of her past. It had a vise-like grip on her life and her emotions and wouldn't let go. Hurt people hurt other people, and if not dealt with hurt will destroy anything and everything in its path. The chains of darkness were wrapped around her and were being pulled tighter and tighter.

Anne knew she had to find a way to get the hurt out, because if you give the devil a ride, pretty soon he'll want to drive. He is forever looking for a way to destroy your life and

when hurt feelings remain, he has the one advantage he needs to pull you down. What this family needed was a giant dose of unconditional love, and God had the perfect person in mind to give it to them.

The problem of having insufficient amounts of financial resources to provide for her family was an issue Anne had to deal with every time she opened her eyes in the morning. Her lawyer was not fighting hard enough on Anne's behalf, so this also was a burden she had to bear. At church she had a friend who was self-employed in a sales business and he agreed to come over to Anne's house and give her a presentation to see whether or not she would want to be involved in this same vocation.

When he arrived he brought with him a friend of his named Jim who was an older gentleman, tall and somewhat frail. Jim was a tender giant who had a heart of gold and the footsteps he took in life were in line with Heb. 13:1,3, "Let brotherly love continue. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels. Remember the prisoners as if chained with them, and those who are mistreated, since you yourselves are in the body also."

Anne, the children, and Jim immediately took a liking to one another and thus was born a friendship that could show the world what love was all about. Jim was also going through the ravages of a painful divorce and he could relate in a personal way to what Anne was going through. With Anne and the children he was given the opportunity to lay aside his own hurt and pain and reach out to make a difference in the lives of other hurting people.

Paul wrote in Eph. 5:12, "Therefore be followers of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also loved us and

gives Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.” As born-again believers we are to be imitators of God as dear children imitate their parents. Jesus came to lay down His life for all of us and we ought to do the same for others.

The Message Bible says, “Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn’t love in order to get something from us but to give everything of Himself to us. Love like that.” Our God is a covenant God and we need to begin to love one another with covenant love that comes as a result of knowing Him. This Jim did to perfection.

The first and foremost thing Jim gave to Anne was respect. Anne is a very beautiful woman, and she was in the middle of a diet where she would eventually lose 35 pounds. Any man would find her attractive, and being compelled by selfishness, many men have asked her out. Of course, these men did not care about Anne the person, but rather their own selfish desires. Anne was always wise enough to see through their meaningless advances, but in Jim she and the children found a friend who cared about them as people. Not one time did Jim act disrespectful, and made it clear to them by his words and actions that he was a friend they could count on.

John 15:13 says, “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends. Putting his own hurt behind him, Jim now had a reason to live and the well-being of this family was all that mattered to him. One of the first things we learn in scripture about the love of God is that it always gives and Jim was put in their lives to give them within his powers whatever it was they needed.

Giving should be the lifestyle of every born-again

believer, and this includes a whole lot more than money. Money is only a small part of giving and before finances can be given we need to get personally involved in the lives of other people, and when we do we'll quickly realize that there is always something we can give that will promote the lives of those we come in contact with.

Walking in love means you are willing to give people love, time, fellowship, counsel, prayers, and any natural resource we have at our disposal. Yes, Jim did help Anne with money when she needed it and was willing to walk to work when Anne asked to borrow his car. Oftentimes he would take his new friends on drives out of town to show them places and things they had never seen before. A whole new world was opening up for them. Jim's kindness and humble spirit revealed to Anne that people in life are not all bad, and that there is goodness in the world. Hope was being planted in Anne's heart that one day she could have the type of life she had always dreamed about.



God is No Ordinary Love

In order to escape from the hurts of her past, Anne needed a fresh revelation of how special she was in the eyes of God. One cannot even begin to fulfill God's royal command to walk in love until they first learn to love themselves. Jim saw Anne's need for a new self-image and began speaking into her life words of love and encouragement. He knew that God's love always builds up and never tears down.

John 4:23 says, "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in the spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him." Everybody likes praise. Even cats and dogs like praise. Praise is a sign of acceptance and this is the primary need of all people.

Throughout history people have gone to great lengths to accomplish great deeds all for the purpose of being noticed and accepted by others. People have a craving to be received willingly and favorably. They want to be approved of and believed in. We need to learn to accept people not based on our preference or their performance, but because God has accepted them.

Paul says in Rom. 15:7. "Therefore receive one another just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God." Just as we praise and worship God for His worthiness, so must we compliment and lift up other people for theirs. Eph. 4:29 tells us, "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but

what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.”

The only thing Anne ever heard come out of Jim were words that were uplifting and complimentary. He was always telling her how special she was and when she felt overwhelmed by the burdens of life, he was there reassuring her that she could make it. Because of these kind words Anne began to feel good about herself and had the courage to rise up in the morning and face the challenges of a new day. Anne knew that Jim was sincere in his praise giving, and because of what Jesus did on the cross, she truly was a special child of God. Nobody likes false praise, and covenant love means that you will be real and spiritual in your relationships.

Honesty was Jim’s greatest gift to Anne. His compliments came from a conviction in his heart that he really believed what he was saying to Anne. She truly was a very, very special person. Prov. 15:13 says, “A man has joy by the answer of his mouth, and a word spoken in due season, how good it is.” Because of this saintly man sent from God, Anne now had a new and refreshed outlook on life and this made Jim the greatest friend a person could ever have.

Still, even with this mountain conquered, Anne had one more Everest-size mountain to climb. Before she could be given the green light to go on and pursue a happy life she would have to conquer the mountain of unforgiveness. Like her mother before her, Anne would have to face and forgive her tormentor. Would her scarred emotions allow her to do so?

The devil is a thief and he uses offenses and unforgiveness to bait the children of God into a life of resentment, hatred, and ultimate destruction. The solution to this evil deception where

one believes they have the right to be offended is found in the Lord's prayer where Jesus taught us to pray these words, **"And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors"** Matt. 6:12.

What is forgiveness? It's when you give up the right to have retribution made against the person who did you wrong. The devil will make you think the other person owes you something for having offended you, but in truth it is you that owes them something. Forgiveness is a debt you owe and Rom. 13:8a says, "Owe no one anything except to love one another..."

When you forgive, you are then free to be forgiven by God for those times when you have missed the mark and became an offense to somebody else. Forgiveness cancels the debt you owe and it also releases that other person from the debt you feel they owed you. And once forgiveness is given, you must get over the hurt and pain you felt and quickly obey the words of Matt. 5:44, **"But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you..."**

On the cross Jesus set the example by asking the Father to forgive His betrayers. Paul says we are to do the same thing when he writes in Eph. 4:31,32, "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another even as God in Christ forgave you."

When you forgive, not because you want to but out of obedience to the will of God, you rob the devil of the stronghold he has over your life. Don't wait for inspirational forgiveness. Forgive as an act of faith. Forgive on purpose. Like love, forgiveness is a decision and not a feeling. Don't wait for an apology from the other person and don't wait for them to change

their behavior patterns. Chances are they never will change. Forgive them anyway because when you don't, the hurt remains. And once you do forgive, stop reliving the past. Forgive and forget. The healing process is always delayed when you relive your past hurt. Get over it and go on with your life.

After a three year court battle, Bill was given the divorce he so selfishly wanted and soon married the woman he left Anne for. With no lawyer to properly represent her, Anne was awarded the small house she and the children lived in and was not compensated with any of the great sums of wealth that Bill has accumulated during their fourteen years of marriage. Anne agreed to these terms, because all that mattered to her were her children and having a roof over their head was her top priority. God was her provider now and she stepped out of that courtroom a single mother of three not knowing the direction her future would take.

Contrary to what the misinformed may believe, receiving the blessings of God is not always a joy ride in the park. More times than not it's a journey into a war zone where strength and endurance will be needed with each step you take. Success is not free, nor is it cheap. You must learn to lean on God and not the arm of the flesh. Do roadblocks signal the end of your journey, or are they stepping stones that lead to a place that is "exceedingly, abundantly above all that we ask or think" Eph. 3:20? In life, circumstances rarely go as we'd like, but in Jesus we can rise up above all the wicked schemes of the enemy.

Being blessed does not mean you will have no more struggles. It does mean that you can rise up above your trials and live on a higher plane than where your problems are. Where man sees the rain, God sees the rainbow. The good news is that

once the blessing is manifested the pains of your struggle are quickly forgotten. Jesus said in John 16:21, “A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world.”

Anne Marie had a rough road ahead of her but God would not let her travel it alone. As always, Jim had been by her side throughout this whole ordeal, but the time was soon coming when he would pass the baton on to a man who could care for Anne on a more permanent basis.

They say success is dealing with a situation as it is, and not as it's supposed to be. Getting rid of a lifetime of hurt and anguish is easier said than done, and there was still much pain inside of Anne that needed to be let out. What she needed now was a man to stand by her side to take and share the pain as this hurt got unleashed from the prison of Anne's innermost being. She needed a man to love her as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her ^{Eph. 5:25}, a man to be there for better or worse, sickness and health, richer or poorer. She needed a man who would love her children as his own and would temporarily sacrifice what he needed in a wife in order to give her what she needed in a husband.

Paul wrote in Phil. 2:4, “Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.” The love of God is no ordinary love. It is a love that continues to love no matter what. It is a love that will always focus on the one being loved with thoughts of self secondary. Pleasant in it's manifestation, love can span all gulfs and distances and can bind together all things that seem to be apart.

For sure, love is the answer to every problem and having a man in her life to love her in such a remarkable way was the farthest thing from Anne's mind. Thankfully, God had other plans. The road she was about to travel on would not be easy but the rewards would make the journey worth any hardship she may encounter.



Together We Can Make It

AS I stood there on the altar watching Anne Marie being escorted up the aisle by her handsome son, I felt like the most blessed man in all the world and I truly was. My biggest dream was about to come true, and from this moment forward my mission in life would be to make all of her dreams come true as well. We had met three months after her divorce in the hallways of this very church just a few feet from where I now stand. Six weeks later we were engaged, and almost one year from the day we met we were here to be bonded together in the covenant of marriage.

Also close to where I stood was an office where Anne and myself had met with Bill, her ex-husband, and his wife in an effort to clear the air of any lingering hurts and pains from their past relationship. I watched Anne look at Bill and say she forgave him for all he had done to her. When she asked him to forgive her, he bluntly refused. Both his pastor and ours rolled their eyes in disbelief. Moments later Anne and I walked out of that office with the freedom to begin the journey that would lead to healing and total restoration of what was stolen from her.

Ps. 147:3,6 says, “He heals the broken hearted and binds their wounds. The Lord lifts up the humble; He casts the wicked to the ground.” That day Anne became a giant in my eyes and here I was watching her walk up the aisle toward me to become my beloved bride. I have never met anyone quite like her in all

my life. To tell you the truth, before I met Anne Marie I didn't realize there could be someone so perfect for me. As I watched her getting closer and closer to me, I knew in my heart that I was the man for her and she was the woman for me. Finding her and getting to know her has been like starting life all over again, only this time it's better.

The world today is craving love like never before. We all have within us the need to love and be loved. Inwardly our hearts are yearning for the acceptance that only a covenant relationship can bring. A covenant is the most sacred thing that exists between people. It is an irrevocable, solemn, and binding agreement where the people involved are totally and forever giving themselves and all that they have to the other person.

Everything that is yours, whether good or bad, becomes the equal property of your covenant partner. Nothing can ever be yours alone again and coupled together with Jesus the two of you become "a three-fold cord that is not easily broken" *Ecc. 4:12*. And, in the eyes of God, all covenants are "'til death do us part." As I stood there placing the wedding ring on Anne's finger, I knew in my heart that we would always be together. Forever.

For our honeymoon we flew to New York state to see Niagara Falls. The majestic splendor of these falls make it one of the greatest natural wonders in all the world. An unlimited supply of water powerfully rush over these falls every second, and it gives you the privilege to step out of your own world into a beautiful kingdom filled with sight and sound. It was magnificent and glorious all at the same time.

The sun was shining bright and hundreds of seagulls filled the air. A cool breeze blew in our faces as we watched the falls and listened to the sound of the roaring Niagara River. A

small bridge leads to an island between the two falls and from there one can look upriver and watch as the mighty Niagara begins its powerful descent to the top of the falls. A section of the river passes around an even smaller island thus creating a beautiful wonder all its own. As we stood there beholding this miraculous display of God's creative power, I knew that these falls were not the most awe inspiring thing I would see today. That honor was reserved for the woman standing by my side. Yes, Anne Marie is the center of my universe. She has put color into my black and white world. She is the reason I get up each morning. She always has been and always will be the wonder of my life.

We left Niagara Falls and traveled to the center of the state where we reserved a dinner cruise on one of the Finger Lakes. The peace and tranquility we felt on the paddleboat was far different than the commotion that surrounds Niagara Falls. As the food was being prepared we walked out on the deck at the back of the boat. We looked to the east and there a bright full moon was rising above the rolling hills that line both sides of the lake.

A warm breeze was blowing over the hills mixing with the cool evening air rising from off the water. Our day was leaving us standing on the open deck and it seemed like we were slipping into eternal bliss. We were in paradise and this moment was a reflection of how God intended life to be. It was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. It was like we were in...heaven.

This was a new beginning for both of us and I determined in my heart that this boat ride would be symbolic of the journey we would take into the crucible of marriage. The journey into the darkness of soulish recovery is tough. It always is. It will

be a journey with much pain and heartache. Tears will be shed and feelings hurt. But, bless God, it will be a journey we'll take together. Side by side. Hand in hand. And like that full moon rising above us, in Jesus we can find a light that shines in the darkness.

We turned and walked back into the dining room, and as I looked at Anne the light from the moon above gave her face a radiant glow. Never had a woman looked so beautiful. Never! I thanked God for such a wonderful blessing and it was then that I thought confidently to myself, "Together we can make it."



Don't Let the Bad Guys Win

It would be a dream come true if Anne and I had the testimony of having a perfect marriage. We don't. Yes, our marriage was ordained in the throne room of God but even that is no guarantee that you'll live happily ever after.

Jimmy Evans writes in his book "Our Secret Paradise" these insightful words, "Think about it. As Christians, our problems didn't all go away the day we met Jesus. But the day that we met Jesus, we met a healer Who was committed to a life-long process of restoration.

Likewise, our emotional and relation problems didn't disappear the day we got married. But the day we got married, we met the agent of our healing. We're each others patients and we're each others doctors. That means going through hell together and coming out the other side.

The way we build a lifetime of love and a great marriage is by getting into the trenches and solving every problem that comes our way. We must fight the enemy together."

The story of our marital struggles and victories is a message for another book. What we know for sure is that having a Christian marriage will be the hardest thing you will ever attempt to do. On top of all the emotional garbage we both brought into our marriage, we've had to deal with four car crashes, a near death experience with a diabetic seizure, countless physical ailments,

a house and van burglarized, a hurricane-like microburst, broken down cars, lost jobs, financial struggles, death of loved ones, totally opposite likes and dislikes, rebellious teenagers, and of course, the dreaded in-laws. And this is just the tip of the iceberg. In other words, it's been fairly normal for a couple who strive to walk the straight and narrow.

1 Peter 4:12 says, "Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you." For sure, Anne and I have been to hell and back more times than we can count. That's the bad news. The good news is that the two of us were joined in a marital covenant with an unrelenting commitment to stick together no matter what happens, and never, ever giving up.

Along with Jesus, the solid Rock on which we stand, this commitment was the foundation our marriage was built on. It has saved our relationship more than once. Yes, we went to hell together, we walked through the valley of the shadow of death, but we did come out on the other side. Sometimes we came out emotionally battered and bruised, and sometimes we were crawling on our hands and knees. But praise Jesus, we did come out. And, like Peter sinking into the water, Jesus was always there to grab hold of us and pull us to our feet.

He comforted us, wiped away our tears, and walked beside us as He gave us the assurance that He was always there by our side. A world known preacher is famous for saying, "Our lives are not where they should be, but thank God we're not where we used to be." Our testimony is that we are still here today sharing with you how we can all overcome our trials and sleep peacefully at night if we'll only put our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, stand our ground when the enemy attacks, and

most important of all, never, ever give up.

It has been said that if we had no problems then we'd never know God could solve them. How true this is. It is also true that most people can handle and solve those basic, mundane problems that come up in day-to-day living. Let's face it, you don't need chapter and verse to fix a flat tire or a leaking faucet. Suffice it to say, a little knowledge and some elbow grease will solve such problems.

There are times, however, when more severe problems occur and seem to come upon us all at once. More times than not they come suddenly and unexpectedly, and for a moment we may be caught off guard not knowing what to do or where to turn. At first it may appear that our lifelong dreams have been shattered and no relief is in sight. Oftentimes, our first response is to cry out in desperation while we ask the age old question, "Why me, Lord?"

All is lost or so it appears. Yes, the Bible says God will lead us to triumph, but for some reason the timing of this manifestation is almost always different from what we'd like. Most times we feel stretched to the limit and we are at a point where we don't think we can take any more. It is at times like this when we all need a word of encouragement that will boost our faith in God to a higher level and cause us to remain strong during the storm. Some time ago I received such a word and the impact of what was said remains with me today.

The details of our situation are not important. Let's just say that an array of strenuous burdens had come into our lives to begin what was to become a multiyear season of heavy testing. Our strength, our endurance, and most of all our faith were being attacked nonstop. Any servant of God comes to expect adversity

from the devil, but never had we encountered anything to the degree that we were now experiencing.

A noted evangelist described adversity as your enemy's reaction to your progress. Yes, much progress had been made in our lives and marriage and in a way these burdens brought an inward joy, because we knew we were successfully invading the devil's kingdom. Good things were happening and being accomplished and we knew the enemy didn't like it. Despite the many setbacks Anne and I had been facing, we knew we had to keep going forward.

The Christian life is more like a marathon race than a hundred-yard dash. Endurance is needed and it is only those who stay strong to the finish that are rewarded. Anybody can begin a marathon, but only champions finish them. This is why the Bible says that many are called but few are chosen.

The time came when the burdens began to increase more regularly and at a higher level of intensity than we'd ever experienced before. In truth, our world seemed to be crashing down around us right before our very eyes. Dreams and goals were being shattered and all our plans were being interrupted one right after the other. I knew we were in a war and I took none of this laying down.

I continued to remain strong in my faith and Jesus was the "Rock" on which Anne and I stood. I was diligently fighting the good fight of faith and all the pieces of the puzzle seemed to be in order. All, that is, except one. This missing piece was bringing much hardship to my life and I knew I had to devote all my time and energy to finding that one missing piece.

Just what was that missing piece? It's what I call a "word of encouragement." A word of encouragement is like the final

cup of water someone gives a marathon runner toward the end of the race. This final burst of energy gives him the added strength he needs to reach the finish line before all the others, even though every bone and muscle in his body is hurting. It relays the message to keep going and don't give up. The Bible says, "a word spoken in due season, how sweet it is" ^{Prov. 15:23b}. So the search began. Somehow, somewhere, I needed to hear a "word of encouragement." Little did I know where I would find it.

As is the case with so many believers, one area where Anne and I began to come under attack was in the realm of finances. I had enjoyed a rich, full season of prosperity for a couple of years until a major layoff at my place of employment sent eight hundred people to the unemployment line. I eventually found work, but was not even making half of what I had made previously. The pressure of never having enough to make ends meet can have a domino effect and cause negative things to happen in every area of your life. The rope around my financial neck was being pulled tighter and tighter, so the search for other income began.

I was working third shift so in the middle of the night on my lunch break I would go to a nearby gas station to get some coffee and the morning newspaper with all the current want ads. The attendant was a sweet lady named Denise and all her customers were greeted with a warm, friendly smile. One night I went there as I normally did only to find that the place was full of police officers. I quickly found out that a few minutes prior to my arrival there had been an armed robbery attempt. Denise seemed to be holding up pretty well, but with all the commotion that was going on I quickly got my paper and left. I saw her the next night and she still seemed to be doing well, although you could easily tell that she was in a battle to keep her composure.

It was a battle she appeared to be winning.

The next night she was doing a whole lot better and was back to her normal, friendly self. She talked more openly about what had happened and I asked her if she felt compelled to quit her job. “No,” she said. “I will not let them run me off.” This little giant of a lady then looked at me with a look of determination in her eye and said, “You know, we can’t let the bad guys win.” There it was!! There was the missing piece to the puzzle that I was searching for. Unknown to her, Denise had just changed my life for she had given me the “word of encouragement” that I so desperately needed to hear.

I do not know what her spiritual convictions are, but I do know that Denise is a woman of character and that is the highest compliment one person can give to another. Those words changed my outlook on life. The devil is the “bad guy” and Anne and I determined in our heart that we will not let him run us off.

Since then, many battles have been fought and won, because we now have the strength and determination to rise up and take hold of the victory that Jesus died to give each of us.

Today our heads are held high and we can go forward with no fear of what obstacles we may face. And why is that? Because God used a sweet, precious lady to tell me “we can’t let the bad guys win.” No we can’t.

No we won’t!

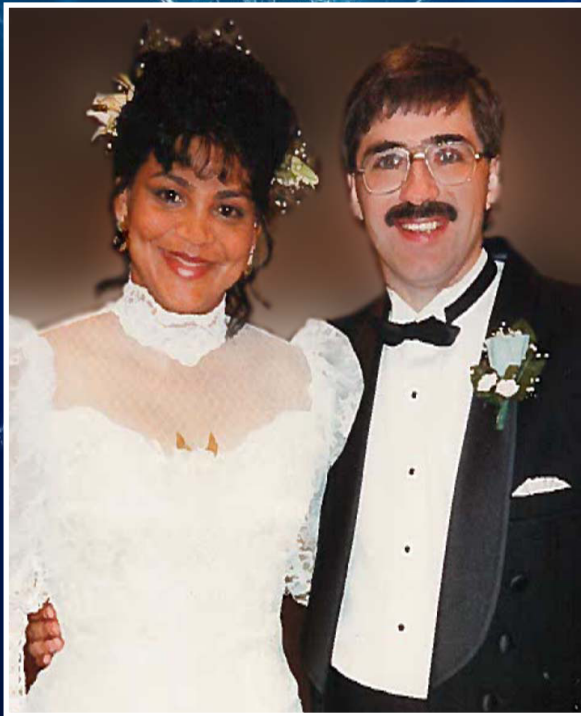




Anne Marie Brewer

Randall Brewer and his beautiful wife Anne Marie have been bonded together by one God, with one love, for one purpose. Their mission in life to encourage all believers to rise up in the midst of their adversity and become all they were meant to be, in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

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