



# SET AFLAME

THE STORY OF ONE  
FAMILY ON FIRE  
FOR GOD

**Matthew E. Bullen**

**“The man started off to visit the Ten Towns of that region and began to proclaim the great things Jesus had done for him; and everyone was amazed at what he told them.”**

**Mark 5:20 NLT**



# 1: From Gangs To God -

***“I have come to set the world on fire.” – Jesus (Luke 12:49)***

I grew up in a rough neighborhood in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Nearly every day in 5th and 6th grade I had to take a different route walking the 3 blocks home from elementary school because invariably some gang members would be waiting to beat me up. I hated elementary school those last two years but they paled in comparison to how rough middle school was and in 7th and 8th grade the violence intensified. I was in or fleeing a fight nearly every day. Getting my hand purposely slammed in a steel door and giving the boy a black eye for it, bloodying another boys mouth after he nearly bit the end of my pinky finger off, and craziness such as this were a regular occurrence for me. One day in 7th grade it climaxed. A high school young man waylaid me. My little brother had beat up his little brother because his little brother had put a broomstick through my little sister's spokes while she was riding home from school and she flipped on her face on the pavement. So, the big brother came to my school with a chain and attacked me while I walked between classes with my arms full of books. I ended up with two black eyes, bloody nose, broken teeth, cuts and chain link shaped bruises all over my face and torso. But the damage to the outside wasn't the real tragedy. It was the damage to my soul. A murderous hate began to well up within me that day. I began to study martial arts, carry weapons, fantasize about thrashing my enemies, and over the next three years became the one picking the fights. I was never beaten up again but fear and hate were my constant companions. Eventually I became the leader of a gang in my high school called Stomps. One day in 10th grade a member of another gang, Leroy, picked a fight with my little brother (a year and a half younger than me) and I told Leroy, "Meet me in the Safeway grocery store parking lot at 2:00pm and we will settle this!" Then I cavalierly shouted, "and bring some friends so I don't get lonely!" My gang of 10 Stomps and I came around the back of the Safeway at 2:00pm armed with clubs, chains, and brass knuckles and got the surprise of our lives. In the parking lot stood 40 rival gang members holding machetes, knives, and pistols! We froze in our tracks. Fortunately, they were looking for us to come around the other side of the building and so hadn't seen us. We quickly ducked back behind the Safeway, agreed that we had to run to live, and took off for a large, nearby apartment complex where we could split up and lose any followers. Sure enough we were seen and hot pursuit followed but just as we hit the apartment complex 3 police cars pulled up and started arresting the rival gang members and we were able to slip away unseen. Leroy and his cousin Rodney became my arch enemies and many conflicts ensued catching the attention of the campus police officer and the principals.

My mother was scared. She told me, "You will end up in prison or in the grave." In the summer of 1982 she went to my dad and told him that there was a Christian summer camp coming up in July and she felt like my brother and I really needed go there. She later said that she felt like it was a last-ditch effort to save her boys before the world completely assimilated us.

So we packed up and went to Singing Hills Youth Camp in the mountains of New Mexico for the week of July 19 – 23, 1982. I figured that I would play some sports, meet some pretty girls, and all would be well. In my wildest dreams I didn't foresee the cataclysmic shift that was about to take place in my life.

God's secret weapon, that I couldn't have counted on, who was preaching twice-a-day that week was a fiery 22-year-old evangelist by the name of Jerry Johnston.

Jerry had been preaching since his radical conversion out of the drug scene at age 14. He enjoyed an anointing of the Holy Spirit unlike anything I had ever encountered to that point. He preached, and I mean

PREACHED, every morning and every evening of that week. He made living for Jesus seem so exciting and the power of God so real that a ravenous hunger and longing thirst for God began to grow in me. I wanted to know God like Jerry did. I ached to have the power that Jerry had with God. The Holy Spirit's conviction was so strong on me as he preached. But, I was a "tough guy" so I resisted Monday morning, Monday night, Tuesday morning, Tuesday night, Wednesday morning, BUT GOD!! On Wednesday night, July 21, 1982, oh what a night.

As Jerry preached, the room seemed to sparkle with electricity. It was as if heaven came down and touched me and the dam broke in my heart and a torrent of God's glorious grace raged down over me. I felt that if I didn't get out of my seat and go to the front when the invitation was given, I was going to explode right in the pew. I bolted to the front to join the dozens of other teens coming to kneel there and I prayed a very simple prayer that I meant with all of my heart, "Lord, if you want me, if you want my life, I'm Yours."

I can't explain the peace, power, joy, and stark raving mad passion that came over me at that moment but deep inside I knew that He had pursued me, He had called me, I was special to Him, and He wanted to use me for something great. The only way I could explain it was just to say that He had "set me on fire" for Him! Jesus stole my heart that night... well, to be more accurate He simply repossessed it. As I was still kneeling there, I felt a hand on my shoulder and I turned to see my brother, Mark (now pastoring in Missouri), with tears streaming down his face as he said, "I gave it all tonight, brother." I remember it as if it happened 5 minutes ago. I was later to realize that God had put that stark raving mad passion in my brother too. The Bullen family would never be the same again.

I went to my youth pastor, Rick (now pastoring in Indianapolis, IN), the next morning and said, "Brother Rick, you are not going to believe me, but I think God is calling me to preach and I don't mean someday, but now. I'm burning up inside but I'm just a 16-year-old kid. I wouldn't even know where to start. Please tell me if this is my imagination. Tell me how to know if it is from God."

Rick wisely opened his Bible to 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and read starting with verse 26

*For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; 27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, 28 and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen..."*

Wow! I was so happy! God has chosen the foolish, the weak, WHOO HOO!! I qualify! Rick prayed with me right there at my bunk and I accepted the mantle that God had placed on my life. Unbeknownst to us, my little brother Mark was lying on the bunk just above us listening and that moment deeply impacted him as well.

The rest of the camp I soaked up every word that Jerry Johnston had to say. Two things he said that exploded in my heart were, first, he told the story of D.L. Moody, the great 19th century evangelist who shook two continents for Christ, and how as a young believer Moody had heard a man, a Mr. Varney, say, "The world has yet to see what God will do with one man who is wholly committed to Him." and how Moody had walked out of that meeting saying, "Oh God, let me be that man." Oh! How my young heart burned when I heard those words! I too wanted to test God in this and see what He would do with little old Matt Bullen. Second, Jerry said to us, "most young people go to summer camp and they cry and they make all kinds of commitments to God but then they go back home and nothing changes..."

Then he shouted, "I'm praying that one of you, and I could have sworn that he looked right at me, goes home and turns his family, his high-school, and his city upside down for God!" Oh! I wanted to jump up and run out to that highway that snaked its way past the camp through the mountains down to my hometown of Albuquerque, New Mexico. I wanted to start hitchhiking home right then so that I could get started turning my world upside down for God. I felt light and tingled all over and my heart was bursting with joy. It was the most wonderful experience to know that God had placed me there to hear those words, that He was real, and powerful, and He wanted me on His team.

Never before, and rarely since had I heard a preacher so full of the Holy Spirit and I determined that I was going to find out how to be filled like that. Jerry talked about fasting and praying, sometimes all night. He told stories about men like David Brainerd and Robert Murray McCheyne and Charles G. Finney. I wanted to know about these men. I wanted what they had. I wasn't going to be satisfied with the "normal" Christianity I had observed prior to that camp. I was going to need to live in a whirlwind of revival fires. My heart was open and I felt the power of God's Spirit on me so strong the rest of that week that I almost thought I was floating.

I learned that Jerry Johnston's ministry theme was Capture America for Christ and that at the young age of 22 (only 6 years older than me at the time) he already had a nationwide ministry that was reaching thousands for Christ. Capture America... what a vision! I started to formulate a plan in my heart of how I was going to help him do it. I was going to have a God-sized vision and humbly filled with Holy Spirit power, I was going to see great things from God.

My brother and I left that camp in the summer of 1982 "On Fire For God." We went home talking about how the world was going to hell and God had Personally called us to do something about it. Well, frankly, we scared our parents, friends, neighbors, pastor, and youth pastor half to death... in the best possible sense. A tremendous spiritual battle had been raging at home with our parents the whole time we were at camp, imagine that. They had suffered one of the worst weeks of their marriage. Everything went wrong with my dad's construction project. There was much anger and conflict. We were hit with it the minute we walked in the door but the Holy Spirit was so near and at night when I would steal away into my room and stretch out on the floor before Him, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit would come again in such sweet fellowship and power and with such a clarity of vision and passion that I couldn't doubt that I was on the right path. The one overwhelming message to me at that time was "this life is a wisp of vapor, a puff of smoke, a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes into thin air... so live for eternity!"

We started spending hours in prayer and in the word reading and memorizing. We talked to anyone who would listen about Jesus. It was a heavenly feeling to know the cause for which you were born and to be about that cause for the glory of God and for the thrill of being in the Lord's army. I knew I had scared my mother when I came out of my room with a big box of all my worldly music and clothes (which I had purchased with my own money) and explained that these weren't glorifying to God and so I was throwing them all away.

I also asked her to take me to the Christian book store so I could get a "real" Bible. She did and I bought a leather-bound King James Schofield Reference Bible. I was so excited I nearly burst. The first thing I did when I got home was to take a red pen and underline every verse in the New Testament about salvation and I began to memorize them so that I could lead people to Christ. The word came alive to me and I saw so many wonderful things there. In a relatively short period of time I had read through the entire Bible.

I remember sitting on the couch at my grandparents' house on a Sunday afternoon underlining verses in red. Every once in a while, I would exuberantly blurt out, "Oh wow! Listen to this verse I found" and I would read it out loud to them. My grandfather would just look at me as if I had lost my mind. The other thing that changed that really shook some people up was that in our rather large church all of the teens sat in the back-right corner of the sanctuary and mostly goofed off and passed notes during the service on Sundays but on my first Sunday back at church after camp I sat up on the front row with my new Bible and a notebook and feverishly took notes of the pastor's sermon. Two weeks before I had been on the back row flirting with the girls and joking with the guys. How my heart and affections had altered. For the first time in my life I had been introduced to something... someOne Who was worth my full attention and devotion, Who was worth my whole life.

The summer was rapidly ending and I began to anticipate going back to school and putting my Capture America plan into motion. The Holy Spirit was so heavy on me. Even though we were already beginning to experience some persecution from our family and friends, such as, lectures against fanaticism, warnings about "burning out", being "so heavenly minded, we were of no earthly good", the constant criticisms and even a punch in the mouth couldn't slow me down. I could feel the Hound of Heaven pursuing me and pulling me into His kingdom work. I knew that there were about 2,000 students in my high school and in my first two years there I hadn't ran into one who really knew the Lord. This was going to be my first mission field. God and my brother and I were going to turn this school upside down for God!

The week before school started I called all of my bull-riding buddies and told them that I had met the Lord and that I was a new man and we weren't going to be having any more gang fights with the Cholos, no more drinking parties, and no more skipping school (the semester before I met the Lord, I had skipped 2/3 of my classes to go get into fights and steal and drink. I had figured out how to forge the attendance secretary's signature so well that I skipped dozens of classes without getting caught). I told them that I was starting a Bible Study at lunch every day in the library and I wanted them to come. After long periods of silence, and a few questions like, "are you messing with me man?" some agreed to come.

Mark and I were prayed up, fasted up, studied up and ready for school to start my junior year at Manzano High School, Albuquerque, New Mexico. We had figured out pretty quickly that we were strange to everyone around us. This being "on fire" for Jesus was very different from every other teen or adult that we knew. But our life was just a puff of smoke and then eternity so we accepted that we were going to be seen as radical or fanatical or just plumb crazy but that was ok. This life is just a vapor that appears for a little season and then vanishes.

We were going to use that little season to prepare for eternity. We realized that this life is like a scrimmage but eternity is the real game.

That thinking marked us for the rest of our lives and we praise Jesus for it.

## **2: Cat Burglars For Jesus -**

***“Aggressive Christianity is the world’s greatest need.”  
– A.B. Simpson***

One of the things that Jerry Johnston had done as a young preacher starting out at age 14 was to start a Bible club in his school in Kansas City, Kansas. He began winning his classmates to Christ and learned to preach as he disciplined them. We had heard him tell about it at camp that week and so we were determined to start where he had started. School started on Monday, August 23, 1982 but it wasn't until Thursday, August 26, 1982 that we were able to shift our classes around and start our Bible club. That Thursday we gathered some of our friends who were willing and met in the library at lunch. I didn't know what to do once we had them all seated around the table but I had heard somewhere that as a new believer you should start reading the Bible in the book of John so I figured the best place to start with these unbelievers was to start there. I opened up my new leather-bound Bible to John 1 and I started reading. I read John 1, 2, and 3 and when I got to the part in John 3 where Jesus tells Nicodemus that unless he is born again he cannot see the kingdom of heaven, I noticed that my brother was talking to our friend Ted Chavez and Ted had tears rolling down his cheeks. It wasn't too long before my brother and Ted bowed their heads and Ted prayed to receive Christ as Savior. It was unbelievable! We left that library like we were walking on clouds. It felt like the book of Acts all over again. We praised and thanked the Lord for His Spirit moving.

When we got home we told our mom all about it and she made a wonderful suggestion. She said that we should start a notebook and write in it the names of the souls that God gave us each day. So we went in my dad's office there in our home and got a brand new red spiral notebook. Here is the entry from the first day...

The Holy Spirit Bible Study  
Started August 26, 1982  
Ted Chavez accepted the Lord 8-26-82

That night we praised the Lord and prayed and rejoiced. The next day, Friday, August 27, 1982 we came to school with a boldness that God was going to turn our school upside down for Him. We started talking to everyone about Jesus and to our amazement some of them were hungrily ready to hear it and eagerly ready to place their faith in Jesus. Others were aggressive and had many questions that I couldn't answer and I knew I would have to do much more studying.

That first week I ran into my arch enemy, Leroy, in the hall. He stopped and looked at me defensively. I said, "Leroy! I'm glad to see you! We aren't going to fight this year. Something amazing has happened to me. I met Jesus and my whole life is changed. Now I have a great love in my heart for you." He leaped back, startled, and said, "You are crazy!" and walked away. I was very sad to learn later that he was killed shortly after that.

That Sunday we came to our youth group so excited to tell our youth pastor about what God was doing at Manzano High. He was shocked and thrilled and allowed us to give our testimony. After the service two girls, Cheri and Debbie, walked up and said they went to Manzano and they wanted to be a part of our club. We were elated to have some fellow soldiers from our church to help us.



The entry in our red spiral notebook the next week looked like this...

Charter Members: Matthew Bullen, Mark Bullen, Mike Meyers, Mark Malles, Glen Jorden, John Owens, Ted Chavez, Cheri Pendley, Debbie Greenwood.

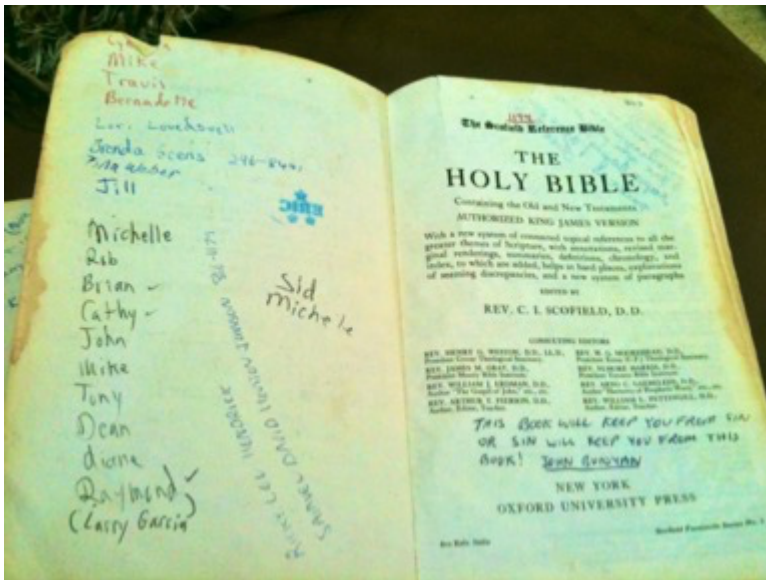
Friday 8-27-82 saved  
David Watkins (won him to Christ during Spanish class)  
Paul Langley

Monday 8-30-82 saved  
Micheal Granjean

Wednesday 9-1-82 saved  
Jennifer Fox

Friday 9-2-82 saved  
Jerry Hicks  
Jennifer Taylor

Tuesday 9-7-82 saved  
Morris Sanchez



We were off and running! I would write the names of the kids who came to Christ in the fly leaves of my Bible and then transfer them to the notebook each night. But in a very short time I ran out of space in my Bible. Over the next 2 years we would write the names of over 300 teens in that red notebook as having professed faith in Christ! We were living the book of Acts!

I started reading every Christian book I could get my hands on. I told my parents, grandparents, and friends that all I wanted for birthdays and Christmas were Christian books and they complied. One book that I have never recovered from was *The Cross And The Switchblade* by

David Wilkerson. This book mightily fanned the flames of God burning in my heart and has affected my ministry for three and a half decades.

We were ablaze! Every day at Manzano High we were running into Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Satanists, Agnostics, Atheists, you name it. I remember one time I was witnessing to a Satanist and he started foaming at the mouth and cursing and blaspheming and tried to bite me before his friends tackled him and dragged him away. In a short period of time we became known throughout the school as the Jesus Freaks and we started getting hauled into the principal's office on a regular basis and threatened

for witnessing about Jesus. Part of the fun was running back to the rest of the Bible club and telling everyone about the miracle that just happened to us. One day my brother came running up very excited and told us that he had just won Rodney, the leader of the Cholos (our old rival gang), to the Lord and that He had prayed with Mark right in front of his whole gang.

Our Bible club was kicked out of room after room on campus but God always provided and that club met every day for the next 3 years. Teens were being saved, lives were being changed, we were discipling our flock and they were devouring the Word and witnessing and winning souls too.

One day we got the idea to stand up in the hallway between classes as everyone was at their lockers and preach a 5 minute gospel sermon. That got us hauled into the office. We would bring gospel tracks to school and pass them out. One day we were hauled into the office and as we were sitting outside the principal's office waiting to be seen we gave out our last tract to a teen waiting there as well. When we were called in they asked us if we were handing out tracts and we said yes. They asked to see one and we truthfully told them we didn't have any more.

Our school had atrium hallways open to the sky with lockers along each side. We got the idea to come in at night over the roof and drop down into the hallways and put a gospel tract through the vent in the door of each of the 2415 lockers. Remember earlier I said stark raving mad passion...? Yeah. We sent off to different tract societies and had them send us the almost 3,000 tracts that it would require and then one night we dressed all in black and delivered our package. We would climb the drain pipe, scurry across the roof, drop down into the hallway, load up the tracts, then boost and pull each other up onto the roof again and scurry to the next hall. Mission accomplished! The next morning it was pandemonium as almost 3,000 students walked through the halls reading a gospel tract and then, something we hadn't anticipated, promptly threw them on the floor. We were hauled into the office for that one! Many young people came to Christ through those tracts and we were walking on clouds. We pulled our cat burglar stunt with the tracts several more nights over the next three years.

One of the neatest evangelistic ideas we had that year was to get everyone in our Bible club a white T-shirt with big red letters on the front that read "DO YOU KNOW?" My brother and I bought all of the T-shirts, bought the red iron-on letters and ironed them on ourselves. We would strategically wear them all on the same day and when anyone asked us, "do you know what?" we would say, "do you know if you died today if you would go to heaven or hell?" Many, many young people came to Christ as a result of those simple T-shirts.

A really nice guy named Gary had the desk next to me in Algebra II my senior year. We hit it off and became friends. Every day I was telling someone about Jesus but I couldn't come up with the courage to talk to Gary about his soul. I really enjoyed him in class and I didn't want to offend him or scare him away. I prayed and prayed and every day I would tell myself, "Today!" "You have to tell Gary about Jesus today!" But each day I would chicken out even though I was very bold with other friends and strangers. Finally, one day I asked Gary to meet me for lunch and that I had something I wanted to share with him. We met and sat down with our lunches and I said, "Gary, I just have to tell you about Jesus and what He is doing in my life." Gary shouted, "Finally!" "I hear that you've been telling everyone else about Jesus and I was wondering why not me?" We laughed and I poured out the gospel to him and he joyfully trusted Christ that day. For the rest of the year he would ask me questions and I would share books and such with him. We would pray together before an exam. Summer came and school let out and 2 weeks later Gary was out in the lake on a boat with some friends and he decided to dive in and swim to shore. 1/2 way to shore he tired out and before any help could reach him, he drowned. For 35 years I've known that Gary is leaning over the battlements of heaven cheering me on as I reach others for Jesus.

In just a couple of months the news of our Bible club began to spread all over the city, state, and eventually the country and we began to get invitations to tell our story at churches and youth rallies.

It was about to get wild...

### **3: 17-Year-Old Evangelist -**

***“The Gospel is not an old, old story, freshly told. It is a fire in the Spirit, fed by the flame of Immortal Love; and woe unto us, if, through our negligence to stir up the Gift of God which is within us, that fire burns low.” — Leonard Ravenhill***

Our Bible club was well underway and within a couple of months we were filling up the youth ministry at our church with teens who were being saved daily in the halls, classrooms, and library of our high school. Our youth pastor eventually convinced the church to designate two 15-passenger vans with drivers and every Sunday morning we would make the rounds and pick up “our kids” from the Manzano Bible Club. The most we ever brought on one Sunday was 42. It was exhilarating being on God’s team and seeing Him respond in big ways as a result of the simple childlike obedience of a few teens to speak about Jesus to someone everyday... and pray like crazy!

It wasn’t long before we were getting invitations to go speak at other churches and ministries about what was happening at Manzano. The first one I remember was especially exciting because it meant traveling with our youth pastor to another city about 200 miles away. We were to share our story at a church called Tabernacle Baptist Church in Roswell, New Mexico. (The amazing providence is that less than 3 years later I would be the youth pastor of this very church and God would launch an amazing ministry there... but that is for another chapter)

On the way there, our youth pastor asked us if we knew how to prepare a sermon. I answered, “Sure! You just pick a subject; find every verse in the Bible that relates to that subject, and preach about it.” Brother Rick very patiently agreed that was one way to do it but would we like to learn about using an introduction, 3-point outline, illustrations, and conclusion. We said, “great!” so the rest of the trip he mentored us in sermon preparation and delivery. It was such a blessing! We poured our hearts out to that church and came home rejoicing. We were now itinerant evangelists just like Jerry Johnston!

Not long after this, Dr. Jack Hyles (now in heaven) was preaching a conference at our church and so we took off from school to go. On the way to the conference I stopped at a dry-cleaners and bought my first necktie. (In the picture below) My youth pastor taught me how to tie a single Windsor knot and I was ready for the conference. It was a blast and I remember sitting there with tears running down my face amazed that I was having this much fun at a preaching conference. Wow! Things had sure changed in my heart. There was this longing that can’t be described in words, a longing to preach and be used by God to transform the hearts of people the way my heart had been transformed. Dr. Hyles from that conference on would have a dramatic impact on my life and thinking.

Another thing that happened at this conference was I noticed that my brother and I were the only ones at the conference who weren’t wearing suits. Consequently, the next week we had our mom take us to Western Warehouse (we were still cowboys after all) and we each purchased a three-piece western cut suit. I can still smell the wool. We polished up our Tony Lama cowboy boots and we were ready to join the preaching circuit. I have rarely felt as exhilarated as I felt the first Sunday I walked into church wearing that suit or experienced the joy seeing the broad smile on my saintly grandmother Gaga’s face when she saw me. In her typical fashion she had me bend way down, kissed me on the cheek and then proceeded

to wipe away the lipstick with her embroidered hankie. I was a man of God! Four years later that saintly grandmother, who had taught Sunday school for 40 years was standing in her pew on a Sunday night singing from the hymnal when she slumped into her seat, laid over, and went to heaven.



Not long after getting my new suit, my pastor, Dr. Curtis Goldman (now in heaven) asked me to preach for him on a Sunday night. I couldn't believe it! Our church of 1000 people was so huge to me and I was so excited and scared at the same time. I prayed and fasted and studied for days and felt the Lord leading me to challenge the congregation with the fact that Jesus had said, "If the world hated me it will hate you." As I looked at the church and the Christians around me and as I read and studied the Bible, the largest dichotomy that I had observed was that the Christians I knew, for the most part, were not turning the world upside down and were not being persecuted for it. The Sunday came and I stepped into the pulpit and experienced something for the first time that I have enjoyed many times since and came later to understand as the anointing of the Holy Spirit. A rush of energy went through me. A boldness that I had never known filled me. I spoke with an unearthly power and authority. I couldn't believe this was happening to me. It was like I was standing beside myself watching

this happen in amazement. The words were just flowing and I could see it on the faces of the people. They sat in rapt attention. I could see a heavenly astonishment on each face.

I preached my heart out and here is the URL for the audio of that sermon. (<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/23041022>) I explained to the people that a direct indicator of whether they were following Jesus or not was the amount of or lack of persecution taking place in their lives. I shared passages such as

*Luke 6:22 – 26 "Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. "Be glad in that day and leap [for joy], for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets. "But woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full. "Woe to you who are well-fed now, for you shall be hungry. Woe [to you] who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. "Woe [to you] when all men speak well of you, for their fathers used to treat the false prophets in the same way."*

I challenged them to look at their lives and ask themselves the question, "Does the world hate me?"

*John 15:19 "If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you."*

I was surprised at how many people came to me after the message and said that they were really challenged to look at their lives. Praise God! I was equally surprised at the number of people, whom I



looked up to, who came to me and warned me to be careful of taking my newfound faith too seriously. I was satisfied in my spirit that I had spoken the truth in love and I trusted God to give the increase.

I spent the rest of that school year building the Manzano Bible Club, preaching where and when I could, and reading and studying and listening to sermons like a madman. Some of the books that touched me deeply early on were Hudson Taylor's *Spiritual Secret*, *Why Revival Tarries*, *Sodom Had No Bible*, both by Leonard Ravenhill, *God's Smuggler* by Brother Andrew, *Absolute Surrender* by Andrew Murray, *Why God Used D.L. Moody* by R.A. Torrey, *How To Pray* by R.A. Torrey and biographies of George Mueller, Adoniram Judson, and William Carey. These books painted for me a radical Christianity that I didn't see around me and I longed for it. As David said in Psalm 63 I thirsted for it as in a dry and thirsty land where no water is. As I tried to live what I read in the scripture and these books the persecution at home, school, and church was intense at times. I continually discovered though that the overwhelming joy of following what the Bible said over what man said and the joy of seeing God's fingerprints all over our ministry as a result overcame all discouragement. The school year ended and I spent the summer working in construction with my dad.

That summer, July of 1983, I also returned to Singing Hills Youth Camp and once again Jerry Johnston was there but this time he was aware of our ministry and we were able to spend some awesome time with him and at the end of the camp he invited us to come on stage with him and share our testimony of what God had done the previous year! It was heady stuff getting to speak on stage with the man whom God had used to lead us to Him. He was also going to be speaking the next week at the camp and he invited us to come back and share our testimony then also. As it so happened, our uncle's church from Dodge City, Kansas was going to be there and our cousin was the youth pastor. Hearing our testimony lit a fire in their teenagers to go back to Kansas and turn their world upside down for God.



Little did I know that less than 4 years later I would be a youth evangelist and would be holding a week-long revival in that Dodge City church. But I'm getting ahead of myself...

We went back to Manzano that next year even more on fire than before.

## **4: Youth On Fire -**

***“Destitute of the Fire of God, nothing else counts;  
possessing Fire, nothing else matters.”  
- Samuel Chadwick***

Shortly after school started in 1983 it was announced that Jerry Johnston was coming to our church to hold a week-long city-wide crusade. We were beside ourselves with excitement. Usually when Jerry went to a city he would hold LIFE school assemblies in every high school in town to talk about suicide and share his hope in Jesus Christ. We were enthralled that he would be speaking at Manzano High! But as Albuquerque, New Mexico is not in the Bible belt and not used to such things, Jerry was denied entrance into all of the schools in Albuquerque. So Jerry sat down with my brother and me and said very intently, “If I can’t go into the schools, I want you two and your Bible club to bring the schools to me!” We said, “Tell us what to do!” He gave us boxes and boxes of tickets, brochures, and posters and on them were printed Jerry Johnston Ministries presents PIZZA BLAST. Come hear about LIFE and get all of the free pizza you can eat. And it gave the date, time, and location. He looked us in the eyes and said, “I want all of these tickets and posters and brochures scattered all over Albuquerque and I want you guys to have 1000 teens here on Friday night!” (This was on the preceding Sunday morning). We told Jerry, “Don’t worry sir, we will have them here; you can count on us!” We left that meeting excited and scared to death! What had we just said?! We went to school the next morning and sat our Bible club down and said very intently, “If the schools won’t let Jerry come then we need to...” well you get the picture. We started praying, fasting, and talking to everyone about the PIZZA BLAST on Friday night. We gave everyone of the 2000 students in our school at least one ticket that week and we went to other high schools and mingled with the crowds as if we belonged there and handed out tickets. We attended the crusade each night that week and heard Jerry preach which further inflamed us for Christ. We gave Jerry updates on how it was going. It was so exciting. One night after the service we took the posters to several high schools and put them up all over the place. We had prayer meetings late at night. By now you see our parents, friends, teachers, etc. were scared to even question what craziness we were up to. They knew that God was driving us because they could see the fruit and the transformations taking place.

Friday night finally came. We ran the vans to pick people up. When we got to the 2 thousand seat auditorium it was packed out with teens and adults. I could see classmates everywhere and I knew that God had answered ours and Jerry’s prayers. The place was so packed that I had to sit in the aisle at the back which was great because I could see everyone in front of me. When Jerry started to preach I felt a wave of the the Holy Spirit sweep across the room and I knew God was going to do something big for our city and for our school. I also felt a deep burning, churning, warfare type urge to pray. I started praying like I had never prayed before. I started begging God to give us souls for our labors. I prayed so hard that I got physically ill and had to step out for a moment and get some air. My youth pastor came to see if I was ok and I remember saying, “I just want to die if God doesn’t give me souls.” We went back in and I continued to pray. When Jerry gave the invitation, hundreds of people flooded to the altars to receive Christ. It was the greatest thing I had ever seen. I saw some of the worst kids in our school getting saved that night. I was awed by the power of God and His goodness. I can’t remember how many young people from Manzano trusted Christ that night but it was over 100. We were given the decision cards (which had a space for which high school you attended) from all of the students at Manzano that came forward that

night and we began to follow up and work at discipleship. We rejoiced with Jerry, our church, and our Bible club that God had done beyond what we had hoped.

We quickly realized that we needed more than Bible club each day and youth group on Sunday to disciple these kids and the rest that were still being saved in the Bible club each day so we started a Monday night teen church and called it Youth On Fire. We met in the gymnasium of our church which was providential because the gym, called the Dennis Elliott Memorial Youth Center, was built in memory of my uncle who was killed by a drunk teenager in 1970. My uncle who was 18 lived across the street from me. He was a sold out Christian young man and my hero. He's the first person I ever remember telling me about Jesus. He died when I was 5. There were over 1000 people at his funeral and the church built the gym in the hopes that it would help get young people off the street and that is exactly what Youth On Fire was about. We would meet every Monday night from 7:00 – 9:00 pm. The first hour we would play games and have sports and then the second hour we would have worship and preaching. It was an awesome ministry. My brother and I would trade off preaching each week and later when we had some preacher-boys rise up out of our group of converts that we were discipling they would alternate preaching with us. We had people saved (adults and teens), we counseled, fed homeless people, had all night prayer meetings, and so on. We were going going going and God was blessing our youthful fire and devotion with growth and great results.

There is no way to tell this side of heaven all of the miracles that took place everyday for those 3 years of Manzano Bible Club and Youth On Fire. Many of those teens are walking with the Lord and in ministry around the country today.

To God be the glory!

We had walked in the Spirit. We had seen Him move in Book of Acts fashion. We had learned to fast and pray. We had learned to suit up in the armor of God and trample our spiritual enemies under foot. We were forever hooked on Jesus. We knew Him, really knew Him. We loved Him and the things of this earth had grown strangely dim. There was a lot of persecution and some hardship but we were Kingdom warriors and it was expected. We had seen heaven come down. But this was to be just the beginning.

As the school year ended I began to think about my future and I began to pray that God would allow me to attend Baptist Bible College in Springfield, Missouri. Many of my uncles and cousins had attended there and I wanted to go there very bad. I had a little money from working with my dad in construction but I needed more finances and a way to get there. My brother and I shared a car but I needed to leave it behind so that he could continue Manzano Bible Club and Youth On Fire while I was at college. Not long after I began to pray about it, my pastor called me in and told me that someone had decided to anonymously support me \$100 a month while I was at BBC. Praise God! I also found out that two teens from our church and a street girl that had been saved in our church wanted to go also and I could ride to college with them! I'll never forget how excited I was getting ready to go and what a surreal feeling it was when I hugged and kissed my family goodbye and headed east for Bible College.

I didn't know what the future held but I sensed that it was going to be amazing and I was not mistaken.

## 5: God's Knighthood For The Soldier-Preacher -

*"When the Spirit was outpoured the disciples were all filled with power from on high, the most unlettered tongue could silence gainsayers, and with its new fire burn its way through obstacles as flames fanned by mighty winds sweep through forests."*

*- Arthur T. Pierson*



I arrived at Baptist Bible College in Springfield, Missouri in August of 1984. I was beyond excited and a little scared about being away from home for the first time in my life. The first day I signed up for classes and then I found out that Dr. W. E. Dowell of Baptist Temple Springfield, MO was having a two-night conference to welcome the students for the new year and Dr. Jack Hyles was preaching! I couldn't believe it! I was so excited. I went to the meeting that night and my world was wrecked. Dr. Hyles preached on Meet The Holy Spirit and he made the sweet third Person of the Trinity seem so wonderful that I wanted to know Him more than anything in the world. I remember walking around the campus until curfew crying out to the Lord to let me know Him like that.

The next night Dr. Hyles devastated me with a sermon called The Fullness of the Holy Spirit. He preached about how the power of Luke 24:47 and Acts 1:8 was for today and was for me. He told stories about men like Wesley, Spurgeon, Whitefield, Evans, Finney, Moody, and others who had counted on and depended on an anointing of the Holy Spirit to do their work and of the miraculous results they had experienced as a result. My heart burned as I listened and hot tears rolled down my face. I felt that I would die if I couldn't have that power from on high to win souls for Christ. I bought both cassette tapes of the messages before I left that night and over the next several weeks I listened to them scores of times until I literally memorized every word. I got a job at night about 5 miles from the school and I would walk to work and listen to those sermons over and over again and cry and pray and beg God to let me know His power like that. I eventually wore them out to where they wouldn't play in my walkman cassette player anymore.

I began getting up every morning at 5:00 am and I would run to Doling Park and spend a couple of hours in prayer before going to class. I would walk the campus at night and pray until curfew. Then I would sneak out of my bed and steal down to the laundry room after curfew and pray sometimes all night begging God to use me, to make me a preacher, to let me in on a mighty work, to give me souls for His kingdom. I began to fast for days at a time. I lost a lot of weight (and I didn't have any to lose back then). I was doing well in school and loving what I was studying but I couldn't get those stories of Holy Spirit anointing on the preachers of old out of my head. I wanted to be used of God or die. It was a sweet time

as I got to know the Lord in a deeper way. I had stumbled across Psalm 63 and it became and remains to this day the prayer of my heart.

*Psalm 63:1 O God, You are my God; I shall seek You earnestly; My soul thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for You, In a dry and weary land where there is no water. 2 Thus I have seen You in the sanctuary, To see Your power and Your glory. 3 Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, My lips will praise You. 4 So I will bless You as long as I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name. 5 My soul is satisfied as with marrow and fatness, And my mouth offers praises with joyful lips. 6 When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches, 7 For You have been my help, And in the shadow of Your wings I sing for joy. 8 My soul follows hard after You; Your right hand upholds me.*

I have prayed that prayer or a portion of it nearly every day of my life since. It truly expresses the cry of my soul.

I began going to the college bookstore and looking for books that would tell me more about power from on high and being used of God in mighty ways. The first two I found wrecked my world worse than I could have imagined. They were both written by Oswald J. Smith, world renowned pastor and missionary statesman, and they were entitled A Passion For Souls and The Man God Uses. Oh my soul! My eyes are welling up with tears as I try to type the titles. Here is an excerpt from the book A Passion For Souls to give you a taste of what God was searing into my soul,

*“But oh, to realize and know that souls, precious, never dying souls are perishing all around us, going out into the blackness of darkness and despair, eternally lost, and yet to feel no anguish, shed no tears, know no travail! How cold our hearts are! How little we know of the compassion of Jesus! And yet God can give us this, and the fault is ours if we do not have it. Who is really travelling in prayer? How many, even of our most spiritual Christian leaders are content to spend a few minutes a day on their knees, and then pride themselves on the time they have given to God! We expect extraordinary results, and extraordinary results are quite possible; signs and wonders will follow, but only through extraordinary efforts in the spiritual realm. Hence, nothing short of continuous, agonizing pleading for souls, hours upon hours, days and nights of prayer, will ever avail.” – Oswald J. Smith*

I can't describe to you how my heart burned to have the anointing of the Spirit and see His power and His glory. I went back and re-read Leonard Ravenhill's Why Revival Tarries and I saw that the first chapter was With All Thy Getting, Get Unction, unction being another biblical word for Holy Spirit power. How my heart burned as I read,

*“Uction cannot be learned, only earned by prayer. Unction is God's knighthood for the soldier-preacher who has wrestled in prayer and gained the victory. Victory is not won in the pulpit by firing intellectual bullets or wisecracks, but in the prayer closet; it is won or lost before the preacher's foot enters the pulpit. Unction is like dynamite.” – Leonard Ravenhill*

I was so desperate to be used of God. I started a journal to track my progress and keep me accountable to my times with God. I also recorded my impressions from God and many, many specific answers to prayer. One of those answers sticks out in my mind. I had recently attended a missions conference and had made a commitment to give \$5.00 a week to missions. I had no money and no job currently and so that commitment was totally on faith and would require a miracle. I prayed hard and at the end of the week I still didn't have \$5.00 to give so I began to cry and complain to God. “How am I going to keep my



faith promise to You, Lord?" I immediately felt lead to go check my mailbox so I walked across the campus and unlocked my box. To my utter surprise, inside was a check for \$500.00! My pastor back home had finally gotten around to sending the anonymous support that he had been receiving on my behalf for the last 5 months! I dropped to my knees and apologized for complaining to God and I never missed my missions offering from then on.

I had been at Bible college for about 3 months and I was very homesick and so was my roommate whose girlfriend was from my church back home so we devised a plan to leave right after classes on Friday and drive the 850 miles home, see our families, go to church on Sunday morning, leave after church and drive back in time to go to classes on Monday morning and this we did.

It was a crazy trip but the life changing thing for me was that after being home for those 30 hours or so we headed back and I listened to a cassette of a sermon by Dr. Jack Hyles entitled Fresh Oil and it was about the anointing of the Holy Spirit for power in ministry. It was like pouring gas on a bonfire. I once again wore this tape out over the next few months.

It was the story of Jack Hyles own discovery and experience of the fullness of the Holy Spirit and I could so relate to his hunger and his search and it assured me so wonderfully that I was on the right track and that just as he had finally been anointed with fresh oil and God had used him to win thousands upon thousands, I knew first, that God had placed this cassette in my hands, and second that He wanted to give me this blessing. I have always been grateful that God wouldn't let me go about this. I am grateful that He created a hunger in me for Him that, though at times of discouragement has sometimes waned, has never left me. He created a fire in my heart and a radical passion to see His power and glory that has never been quenched.

It wasn't all reading, fasting, and praying though. I had developed a group of friends who were passionate about Christ and we enjoyed many activities together all centered around church of course. Springfield, Missouri is the world headquarters of my denomination at the time, Baptist Bible Fellowship International, and the world headquarters of The Assemblies of God denomination and there were 4 Christian colleges in this relatively small town so needless to say, there was some kind of Christian concert, revival, Bible conference, Christian film series, etc. going on every week and we enjoyed many of them. Every day we had chapel and the college would bring in a different preacher from around the country and the huge college choir would boom out hymns and it was amazing. I'll never forget them singing The Solid Rock like every day. It quickly became my favorite hymn. I would sing out at the top of my voice,

*"My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame but wholly lean on Jesus name. On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand."*

After battling Satan and his hordes at Manzano High School for 2 years this truly seemed like heaven. We even called the little creek that ran through the campus, the Jordan.

We were seated for chapel alphabetically by last name and with my last name being Bullen I was seated on the second row of the large auditorium. Every day I would glance up into the choir loft at this pretty redhead that was singing in the alto section. She always caught my eye, not only because she was pretty and a redhead but because I could swear that every time I looked up there she was smiling at me. It was a huge auditorium and even from the second row I couldn't see her well enough to know for sure.

I figured it was probably just my imagination but as it turns out...

## 6: God's Warrior Princess -

***“Like the Spartans, every Christian is born a warrior. It is his destiny to be assaulted. It is his duty to attack. Sparta could not have been defended by a race of timid creatures armed with pointless spears, neither can young people of timid spirit do great things for God.” - C.H. Spurgeon***

So, I kept seeing this redhead in the choir but I was sure that I was imagining that she was smiling at me. As I learned later the redhead's name was Lisa and she actually was smiling at me and had been watching me for some time. She says that of all the young men in that auditorium, I was the most serious and passionate about the singing and preaching and this intrigued her. Each day when she came back to her dorm her roommates would ask her if she had met a guy yet and once again she would explain that she was not there to meet guys but to get prepared for ministry. Finally they wore her down and one day she told them, “well there is this one guy I would like to meet but I don't know his name.” They squealed with delight and made her promise to point this young man out the next time she saw him. So later that day I came walking into the cafeteria and Lisa pokes her roommate and says, “there he is...” her roommate Karen looks up and says quite loudly, “Matt Bullen!!!??? That's the guy you want to meet?!, Hey Matt!! Come over here! So now Lisa is bright red and crawling under the table. It turns out that her roommate is my dear friend Karen from my church. I came up with Karen through Sunday school since we were 4-years-old. Karen is like a sister to me. Lisa is petrified and of course I have no idea what is going on and at the moment I don't even recognize Lisa as the girl from the choir. Karen just introduces me to all of the girls at the table and I move on never giving it another thought. But for a week or so after this Karen keeps telling me that her roommate likes me and she wants me to meet her. I keep telling Karen that I can only imagine what kind of girl she is trying to match me up with and I want no part of it.

Finally, one day we are having a big lunch on the grass in the middle of campus and Karen comes and starts dragging me by the hand to meet her roommate. I reluctantly give in and she walks me up to Lisa and my eyes bug out because its the pretty redhead from the choir! I feel like telling Karen, “Why didn't you tell me it was the pretty redhead?” Anyway, we talk a little but this girl Lisa is painfully shy and so I'm not sure if she is really enjoying this conversation or if Karen coerced her as well.

The next day however we had a chance to talk for a long time and tell each other our conversion stories and our teen ministry stories. I was blown away! We had similar stories. We had the same passion! We had the same love for Jesus! We had the same vision! I was enthralled as I listened to Lisa tell her story. She was born in Detroit, MI to a wild mother.

Here is part of her story as told to a women's Christian retreat recently.

*“I grew up in hell on earth until one day when I was in the eighth grade when my public school chorus teacher invited anyone who was interested to a Bible Study at his house on Tuesday nights. He would pick us up and take us home afterward. If you grew up in a house like mine, you, like me, would have been looking for any opportunity to go anywhere but home after school. You see my mom was married and divorced 5 times before I was 10 years old and had never married my biological father. I've never met my biological father. I don't even know his name. My mother*

*and her husbands were alcoholics. My home was full of anger, drugs, fighting, pornography, yelling, and many kinds of abuse, to the point where she was shot five times by one abusive husband and should have died. By God's grace she lived but went right back to that life style. So you see a Bible study was preferable to home on any given day or night.*

*That same semester I played a lot of sandlot baseball. We would play almost every day after school just down the street from a new, born again Christian man, who was asked to start a youth group at the new church in my hometown. Every day he would drive past our makeshift baseball field, and from time to time he would stop and invite us to church. We would commit to going and he would leave but we wouldn't go. One day he stopped by to invite us and we again said we would come and he challenged us to just tell the truth. Why do you say you will come when you don't plan on coming? We said we would and we did and that decision changed my life. That Sunday I was introduced to a Christian Community that taught me and showed me what the "hands and feet" of Christ looked like. My youth pastor Howard and his wife, Sharron, Pastor Lewis and Mrs. Lewis and many more people at Lighthouse Baptist Church along with my chorus teacher at my public school poured the love of Christ into me, sacrificed for me, helped me, taught me, picked me up for church on Sunday morning, Sunday night, Monday night for visitation, Tuesday night for leadership class, Wednesday night for prayer meeting, Friday night for youth activity, Saturday morning for visitation and cleaning the church and so forth for one month? No, For six months? No, For one year? NO, for four and a half years! They even opened their homes up to me to live with them when I needed a home for two of those years. You see, that Christian community taught me about Jesus, how to follow Jesus, and how to live life together. The people at Lighthouse Baptist church loved me and showed me how to love others. They took it upon themselves to develop the love of God in me. In this church it was like second nature for them to share the gospel everywhere they went and then begin teaching the love of God and the Spiritual disciplines to those who followed. For a period of time we lived about 45 minutes one way from the church. The pianist lived just past us and she would pick me up for church from time to time. One day she noticed I didn't have my own Bible. The next time she picked me up she gave me a brand new Bible. I had many needs and Jesus provided those needs through that precious Christian Community.*

*My senior year in high school I carried my Bible with me everywhere I went. At lunch I would sit in the library and read it. One day a girl named Patti came up to me. I braced myself for the snide remarks that I knew would come but she quickly turned and left. A few moments later she returned with a copy of the Bible she had found on the shelf, she sat next to me, plopped it down on the table, opened it and started reading. Then she said, "How do you read this thing because I can't understand it." I opened my own Bible to Romans and shared the gospel with Patti and explained that once she knew the author she would understand His book. Patti accepted Jesus that very day in the library. Soon Patti brought me her friend Michelle who wanted to know what had happened to Patti and if she could have it. I shared the gospel with Michelle and she received Christ. Pretty soon I had a Bible Club in my public school library. That year I shared the gospel with many and 6 to 8 began to follow Jesus and came to church with me regularly. It was a heavenly year.*

*One evening, after church the summer after I graduated as we were locking up and walking out of the church, my pastor mentioned to me that I had not scheduled my senior meeting with the pastor yet. I responded with "oh?" I didn't know about any such meeting. The town I grew up in was very small and the church was also a small church. We only had one high school and I was the only senior that year in our youth group. I promptly scheduled the meeting and went to meet*

*with my pastor. I was at a total loss as to what this meeting was all about. As I entered his office and sat down he asked me "What my plans for my future were?" I had no clue, up to this point in my life my plans were to survive my home and graduate. You see, I was the only person in my family that graduated from high school. So far I had fulfilled my plans and didn't know what to do next. I had dreams about marrying a preacher, raising warriors for Christ, and glorifying God with my life. However, I had not met any young men that were on fire for God and unfortunately in my small town it was highly unlikely that I would. My pastor pulled out a stack of Bible college catalogs, college entrance packets, and grant information applications. Then proceeded to explain to me that he had researched many schools for me to attend and that he thought I should apply to Baptist Bible College in Springfield, MO. I almost passed out. What? Me go to college. I didn't know anyone who had gone to college and we were poor. Who was going to pay for this? After the initial shock, I thanked him, picked up the papers and started filling out the applications for grants and admission forms. I had a lot of praying to do for my mom to let me go to MO and attend Bible College at age 17. A few weeks later, my mother and step-dad left me in the parking lot of Baptist Bible College where I began my next adventure of learning how to live missionally. Lighthouse Baptist Church was my first introduction to Christian Community in Action. They shared the gospel with me, they baptized me, they disciplined me, they taught me how to share the gospel, they taught me how to love others by example and leadership, they taught me to love the Bible, to follow Christ, to believe, how to fast and pray, they taught me what a Man of God looked like and how to become a Women of God, they taught me to love reading, how to learn, how to rear children, how to be a good wife, modesty, to memorize Scripture, basically everything I needed to grow up in the Lord and now sent me to do the same. Reminds me of Jesus when He said in Matthew 28 Go into all the world and make disciples, baptize them and teach them to go and make disciples, baptism them and teach them to go...*

*Friends, God has given us two commands in Scripture. First one is to love God and the second one is to love others. Then He commissioned us "Go" take the gospel to the world. This begins with the first one you see in the morning and extends to the furthest person in the world. Love God, Love Others, and share the gospel... teach them to love God, love Others, and share the gospel. My pastor was right and I did find that Man of God that they taught me to look for and I earned my M.R.S. degree before I started my second year of Bible College."*

I couldn't believe how similar our stories were! I knew this was the girl God had made for me. I had a little problem though. I had a girlfriend back home that my whole church thought I was going to marry. I had been chasing this girl on and off since I was in the 7th grade and everyone knew we were going to get married after she graduated high school. (Of course because we were strict Fundamental Baptists, chasing her meant trying to sit by her in church). Now I had met Lisa, this redheaded girl of my dreams and I was in a pickle. I explained my situation to Lisa and we reluctantly agreed that we should just be friends but neither one of us were very happy about it. We started meeting with some other friends every day to pray and seek God for His power to win souls. I was sharing with Lisa all of the things I was reading about the Holy Spirit and revival and she was getting



more and more fired up. She and the girls in her dorm started having all night prayer meetings asking God to revive our college and to give us souls.

The more time we spent together the more I knew we were both falling hard for each other and I kept trying to figure out how to get out of the fix I was in. It seems comical now but at the time it was a serious dilemma. When I went back home for Christmas, my girl back home informed me that she had met another guy and that she thought we ought to “date around” while I was away at college. No young man was ever happier to be dumped!!

During this time another dilemma had been rising up in me. I had loved and soaked up all of the study and the prayer and the seeking God my first semester at Bible college but one thing was eating at me. I had just spent two years in high school winning souls every day, teaching every day, preaching every week, and various other ministry adventures and though I had needed the time with God and the season of searching for His power I was now ready to get involved in some sort of ministry and get back in the action. I had noticed a sign at Baptist Temple where I attended that read Teens Unlimited Youth Ministry. I felt drawn to that sign and I started praying that God would let me get back to winning the lost somehow and that he would let me be a part of that ministry. To my amazement, within a couple of weeks I was invited to be an assistant youth pastor in that ministry and they were also looking for a young woman from the college to work under the youth pastor’s wife and minister to the teen girls. I immediately told them about this awesome young woman named Lisa that I knew would love to have that position.

So shortly thereafter Lisa and I were off and running working in Teens Unlimited and going to Bible college and more miracles were about to begin...



## **7: Teens Unlimited -**

***“Flame is the air which true Christian experience breathes. It feeds on fire; it can withstand anything rather than a feeble flame;”***

***– E.M. Bounds***

God had abundantly answered my prayers to be back in the action of winning and discipling young people while attending Bible college by allowing me to be a part of Teens Unlimited Youth Ministry at Baptist Temple, Springfield, Missouri. Lisa and I were quickly assigned a bus for Sundays to pick up teens and we started hitting the streets on Saturdays visiting and witnessing to young people. God blessed our efforts and soon teens started getting saved and coming to Teens Unlimited on Sunday. We would go all over Springfield and just stop teens on the street and start telling them about Jesus. During the week our prayer groups would be praying for the teens and workers by name. We began to see God really move in hearts and change lives. It was so exciting.

It wasn't long before I was asked to preach to the teens on a Sunday morning. I was ecstatic. I had been studying and praying for power to preach and this was my chance. Lisa and I made a pact to fast and pray as much as we possibly could the week prior to the Sunday I was supposed to preach. By Sunday we were so weak and so tired that I was wondering what in the world I had been thinking. Lisa knelt on the stairs outside the door of the building and prayed the whole time I gave my sermon but I felt like it was a total flop. I preached my heart out for 45 minutes and then went and sat down on the front row and put my face in my hands and started to weep. I was complaining to God that I had fasted and prayed and preached my heart out and I didn't feel anything supernatural. Just about then I heard a great rustling and I peeked up to see dozens and dozens of young people at the front weeping and repenting and giving their lives to Christ. I couldn't believe my eyes! I hadn't seen something like this happen since the last time I was in a Jerry Johnston crusade. I put my face back in my hands and started praising God with everything I had. The invitation lasted as long as the sermon and at the end of the 2-hour service almost all of the teens in that ministry had either been saved or rededicated their life to Christ that morning. Praise God! That night the baptism service was amazing as young person after young person was baptized. I'll never forget it as long as I live.

A few weeks later, on Easter Sunday morning I sang Don Francisco's song He's Alive as special music at the beginning of the service and the Holy Spirit swept across the room in such a way that the youth pastor gave an invitation right after I finished singing because many were weeping and the whole room came forward and we fell on our knees and praised God. The word began to spread through the college about the revival at Teens Unlimited. We continued working the streets and winning souls and building Teens Unlimited and more and more invitations started coming for me to preach around Springfield and around the country. Our team of prayer warriors and I made a trip to Indianapolis Indiana and held a youth rally and souls were saved and lives changed. We got to go to Kansas City and hang out at Jerry Johnston's ministry headquarters and other amazing things. I was preaching so much that I couldn't work a job and most of my preaching engagements didn't pay anything so we would "pray down" the money to go. I'll never forget whining to God one night that I had prayed and prayed and believed Him for some money and nothing had come in. I got up off my knees and went to my mailbox on campus and there was a check inside for \$300.00. Boy did I do some apologizing for my unbelief to the Lord that night.

Then we heard that Jerry Johnston was coming to hold a week-long conference on evangelism at our school and he needed volunteers to hand out brochures and put up posters and promote the meetings. We jumped in and helped and then sat enthralled each night as different speakers from around the country preached about evangelism and winning the lost. It was exciting to get to spend some time with Jerry and tell him about what I was doing at Teens Unlimited. One night a young pastor preached on Power From On High and he told about how Jesus, our example, was anointed of the Holy Spirit to do powerful ministry and so must we be. He preached from Is. 61:1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me To bring good news to the afflicted; and Acts 10:38 "You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. I was tore down. I remember going to the front during the invitation and praying so hard that I didn't realize the meeting was over and I was the only one left at the front until one of my buddies came and got me and we left. God was continually reminding me of where the source of power was from to reach souls.

Lisa and I were steadily growing in our love and admiration for each other though we were still not considering ourselves romantically attached. We were just "working in ministry together" but we were inseparable and had been for 6 months. March 1, 1985 would change all of that. This night was supposed to be a youth ministry night but for some reason that I can't remember it got cancelled and we ended up going to the mall with a young evangelist and his wife to hang out. This young man had worked for Jerry Johnston Ministries and now had his own ministry and he was also helping out at Teens Unlimited. We hit it off that night and had a wonderful time. I'll never forget at one point he turned to me and said, "what is the deal with you and Lisa?" I said, "well we really like each other but we aren't dating or anything." He said, "Why not?" I said, "well frankly she is so perfect that I'm afraid if I date her I will want to marry her." He said, "And what is wrong with that?" and I said, "I don't know if she is God's will, or how to even know how to know if she is the right one and I don't want to make a mistake." He laughed and said incredulously, "So you are telling me that you love her, she loves you, she's perfect, she thinks you are perfect, but you are not sure if she is God's will for you???" Then he held up his arms like Elijah and said in his best Jerry Johnston imitation "Matt Bullen, how long halt ye between two opinions?" "Marry this girl!" It was the mentor approval that I needed. I asked her out that night and she looked at me like, "I was wondering when you were ever going to ask?" and we had our first date the next Saturday night, March 7, 1985.



Shortly after, I received an invitation from Lisa's pastor in Michigan to come and preach at his church. I was excited to meet him and Lisa's family and friends. I had been asking the Lord what He wanted me to preach and one day as I was walking around a high school campus praying for the teens there it struck me that the reason most Christians weren't reaching people for Christ was that they didn't fully grasp the gravity of three things. I felt that if people had a clear vision of the horrors of hell, a clear vision of the glories of a transformed life in Christ, and a clear vision of standing before the judgement seat of Christ and giving an account of how they had used that transformed life, their lives would be different than most of the Christianity I saw around me. I was excited about preaching this message for the first time at Lisa's church. I was also excited because most of Lisa's family didn't know Christ and she and I were praying that they would come to hear Lisa's "beau" preach and God might do something mighty on their behalf. We caught a ride with some other college students and headed for the Detroit area. We had a wonderful time with Lisa's church and got to meet her family. I preached my heart out that night. The sermon was entitled Get A Vision. The URL for the audio

of this sermon is here, (<https://www.spreaker.com/user/mattbullen/get-a-vision-matt-bullen-spring-1985>) God blessed it and many came to Christ that night, some in Lisa's family. It was glorious. I'll never forget what Lisa's pastor said to me after the invitation ended and all of the people went back to their seats. He looked at me in amazement and said, "son, just never get to where you think it was you that did this." I said, "yes sir", and I have kept that promise. Glory to God alone for His mighty works.

God continued to bless our ministry at Teens Unlimited. Many days and nights I would walk to the different high schools in our part of town and walk around the campuses asking God to give me the souls on those campuses. One day to my utter amazement the Sr. youth pastor told me that God had burdened his heart for all of the high school kids in Springfield and he asked me if I would hold a city-wide youth crusade for Teens Unlimited. He said that he would get the pizza and everything just like Jerry Johnston was doing around the country and we could invite all of the teens in the city to come and I could preach to them. He said that we could have an all-night prayer meeting the night before and just see what God would do. I was delirious with excitement. I ran back to our little group of prayer warriors and told them about the plans. We began to plan, promote, and pray. We prayed all night the night before and then worked all day the next day to get ready. The night finally came and there in the stands were all kinds of kids from all over Springfield. I was so weak and tired I was really worried but I stood up and preached my heart out all the time begging God in my spirit to do something amazing for these young people and to lift up the name of Jesus. Audio of that sermon can be found here (<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/6620298>) To my great delight, when I gave the invitation teens started streaming to the front to be saved. I remember praying with one young man from the local football team and when we finished praying he jumped up and beat his chest and said, "I got it! I got it! I'm going to heaven now!" It was a miracle night. Cheerleaders, and jocks, and druggies, and just kids of all kinds got saved that night. It also blessed me beyond words to look to back of that auditorium and realize that

my pastor, the chancellor of our college, Dr. W. E. Dowell had stood back there the whole time praying for me. Our faith was growing and we knew that God's word was true.

Shortly after the Pizza Blast as we called it, the Sr. youth pastor announced that we were going to be taking a mission trip to the inner city of New York in the next few months. We sent off to all of the gospel tract societies in America I think and asked for free tracts. In the end we collected just at 1,000,000 tracts to take on this trip. We did car washes and fundraisers to raise the money to go.

Before we left in July however, I wanted to take Lisa home and meet my folks and friends in New Mexico. We had borrowed a car from my childhood friend and BBC compatriot, David, and gathered up all the money that we had for gas. We did the calculations and knew that it wasn't enough to get us the 850 miles to my house but we really felt that God was in this trip so we set out by faith, trusting that He would provide along the way. We headed out praying like crazy that God would stretch the gas mileage or send a strong tailwind as our miracle. We made it all the way to eastern New Mexico before we ran out of money and gas. We pulled into a little gas station in Tucumcari and decided to go into the Hardy's, use the restroom, then come out and lay hands on the car and pray and see what God would do. We bowed our heads and asked the Lord to provide. I went into the men's room and when I came out there were three men talking to Lisa and she looked a little pale. I walked over and introduced myself and realized that they were asking about the Teens Unlimited logo on our shirts. They asked us to sit down and Lisa and I explained about our ministry and that we were going home to see my folks and then returning to go on the mission trip to New York City. One man said, "hey can I buy you guys something to eat?" Lisa and I hadn't eaten for a couple of days because we were saving all of our money for gas to get home but I was still unsure about these guys so I told him no thank you. Lisa kicked me under the table and gave me a look like, "what are you saying? I'm starving! You're stealing my miracle, man!" She never has let me live that down. We finished visiting, said thank you and rose to leave. The man said, "I feel like the Lord wants me to do something for you. I can't let you leave without doing something." I'll never forget the feeling in my stomach when he reached in his pocket pulled out his wallet and said, "here, I want to give you a little something to help out with your ministry, will you take this?" and handed me a \$20.00 bill (just enough to get us home). My head was swimming and I wanted to run out the door and put gas in that car right then before that \$20.00 disappeared or something. We thanked them, got gas, and headed home praising God! The most amazing thing about this story is that some years later I would be interim pastor for a time at the Temple Baptist Church in Tucumcari, New Mexico and the man who gave us the \$20.00 was a member of that church and he sat under my preaching for a time and I got to tell him what a miracle that money was for us.

We enjoyed 2 weeks at home and then back to Springfield and then off to New York City. It was a marvelous trip. We got to sing and preach on the streets and we handed out all of our 1,000,000 tracts in just a few days. It was astonishing. I remember a busy intersection in the Bronx. We would have 4 people on each corner with an armful of tracts handing them out to people as fast as they could for hours and hours. Sometimes a line would build up as the people were waiting to get whatever the young person was handing out. Many times they would stop and read it right there and we were able to engage them in discussion and lead some of them to Christ. There was a little church plant in the Bronx called Lighthouse Baptist Church and I got to sing there one Sunday night. I also got to preach at a church in Saddlebrook, New Jersey just outside of the city. It was a blessed time. We also did some sightseeing and Lisa and I stood on top of the World Trade Center and dreamed of the day we would hold city wide evangelistic campaigns in major cities all over the country. Our minds, hearts, and dreams were expanded.



We came home to Springfield, and with the approval of our Sr. pastor, Dr. W.E. Dowell, (now in heaven) who was also chancellor of our college and a mighty man of God, we decided that we should get married before the next semester started. We set the date as August 3, 1985 (Lisa's step dad's birthday) which was just a few weeks away. The teenagers from Teens Unlimited and our Bible college friends rallied around us and we had a wonderful wedding. Many of the people who stood up with us, sang for us, decorated, and more were teens that we had won to Christ that year. The young evangelist who had asked me at the mall "How long halt ye between two opinions?" and his wife were our best man and matron of honor and the Sr. Youth Pastor, Bro.

Larry, walked Lisa down the aisle. The teenagers had taken up a collection and rented us the honeymoon suite at the nicest hotel in town.

No two kids were ever happier to be wed. She was 18 and I was 19 and we were ready to win the world for Christ... together!

## 8: A Man Obsessed -

***“May God so fill us today with the heart of Christ that we may glow with the divine fire of holy desire.” – A.B. Simpson***

Lisa and I started out married life in a Baptist Bible College married dorm. It was so cute. It was a tiny one room efficiency apartment with a Murphy bed that folded down out of the wall. Shortly after we moved in my mother shipped us a big box of wedding presents that the dear folks at my church in Albuquerque had collected for us. We set up our little home very nicely. Shortly thereafter we were out soulwinning and ran across a homeless Hispanic family living in their van with two little kids. With the help of our prayer team we set them up in a little apartment and my new bride gave them all of her wedding presents to help establish them in their new home. They came to Christ and were baptized and we stayed in touch with them until we moved away. This was to define our family forever. From that moment on our house was always going to be a home for anyone the Lord sent and our possessions were always going to be “on loan from God” until we ran across someone who needed them more than we did.

We were still working in Teens Unlimited, praying, preaching, soulwinning, and studying like mad people. I was still pursuing my study of the anointing of the Holy Spirit and during our first 6 months of marriage I read every single book in our bible college’s two story library on the Holy Spirit, gifts of the Spirit, revival, and evangelism. I was a man obsessed with having what Jesus had in...

*Luke 4:14 And Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about Him spread through all the surrounding district.*

and

*Acts 10:38 “You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good...”*

and the apostles had in...

*Acts 4:33 And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all.*

and Paul had in...

*Romans 15:19 ...in the power of the Spirit; so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.*

and

*1 Corinthians 2:4 and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.*

and

*1 Thessalonians 1:5 for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction;*

I knew that I could honestly say with Paul...

*Acts 20:24 my life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News of the wonderful grace of God.*

I read the stories and biographies of men and women throughout church history whom God used mightily and the more I read the more my heart burned to know God and expand His kingdom like those men and women had. I read about D. L. Moody, R. A. Torrey, Wilbur Smith, Charles G. Finney, Billy Sunday, George Mueller, William Carey, Adoniram Judson, Christmas Evans, Peter Cartright, George Whitefield, John Wesley, Mordecai Ham, The Moravians, David Brainerd, Robert Murray McCheyne, Jonathan Edwards, C.H. Spurgeon, William and Catherine Booth, Hudson Taylor, George Fox, Andrew Murray, Oswald J. Smith, and many others. I wanted so desperately to see God vindicated in the world and to see Him show His power and I wanted so bad for people to know Him and not be lost anymore. Story after story and biography after biography I saw the same patterns. I saw the same ways that their Holy Spirit birthed passions played out. I saw the same countercultural decisions and leaps of faith that they were driven to make and I was convinced that what I was going through in my soul was from God and not just crazy. All of them had a mad obsession for the gospel to spread around the world. All of them had all night prayer meetings. All of them fasted and prayed like crazy. All of them wouldn't speak until they knew the presence of the Holy Spirit had descended. All of them traded worldly success, wealth, and acclaim for want, suffering, and hard labor often in obscurity. A life of radical abandonment to the spread of the gospel no matter what the cost was not uncommon among them. The Moravians for instance would even sell themselves into slavery in or to get passage on a ship to a place where they knew the gospel was not known.

All along the way, since I gave my life to Christ at Singing Hills Camp, I had faced resistance from my family, friends, and even spiritual leaders. The fact was, I was just too radical for most of them. And yet as I delved deeper and deeper into my studies of the history of great awakenings, reformations and revivals, which is what my soul longed for so desperately, I was shocked to find that compared to them, I wasn't radical at all. Nevertheless, I began to experience more and more resistance and even persecution from those in the Bible college and in the church whom my so called radical life had caused to be uncomfortable. They chided me on talking about fasting so much. They chided me for spending so much time in prayer and for spending all of my free time witnessing to people on the street, in parks, and bringing the misfits into the church.

I became weary of the opposition and it wasn't long before I began to feel strongly that I should leave school and pursue a ministry of evangelism full time. My sweet wife humbly agreed so we packed up what little we had, said our tearful goodbyes and headed for New Mexico. I felt that I would have more opportunities back home where my life and ministry were known.

Shortly after arriving back in Albuquerque we discovered that we were expecting our first child.

We were ecstatic! Our families however, were not amused.

Here we were 19 and 20 years old with nothing to our name, not even a car. And yet we were out to save America! We moved into a little apartment in The War Zone as it was called. It was a section of Albuquerque riddled with drugs, gangs, poverty, and crime.



I put a handmade sign on the door of the apartment that read, "Matthew Bullen Ministries Revival Center" and we began to pray for God to open the doors for us to serve Him.

Within a month, I was offered the chance of a full-time position as a youth pastor / church janitor at a church in Roswell, New Mexico.

Lisa and I bought an old beat up car from a salesman in my home church, drove to Roswell and I preached for the church and did an interview and was hired for \$175 a week and free rent in a condemned house on the property.



Lisa and I were excited out of our minds. We felt it was a good place to start winning the world to Jesus and so we accepted, trusting God for great things.

## 9: Fire In The Church -

***“The church of our times needs the apostolic spirit. She needs so deep a baptism with those fires of Holy Ghost that she can go out and set the world on fire by her zeal for the souls of men. Till then the generations of our race must go on, thronging the broad way to hell because no man cares for their souls.” – Charles G. Finney***



In March of 1986 we packed up and moved to Roswell 200 miles southeast of home and moved into a little old parsonage. My first day on the job as the new youth pastor, the former youth pastor, who sadly was leaving the ministry and his wife for another woman, was directed by the pastor to take Lisa and I around and show us the city. I'll never forget how he took us by both high schools and when we mentioned how we had Bible clubs at our respective high schools and how we had started them at Teens Unlimited in Springfield, Missouri he said, "Oh we've tried all of that here. You won't be able to do that in Roswell." Lisa and I just looked at each other and smiled. We had seen what God could and would do when His children

meet the kingdom prerequisites of heart hunger, sacrifice, bold faith, and radical obedience to His word and we had a humble confidence that God was going to show up and show off in Roswell. He spent several hours driving us around telling us what we couldn't and wouldn't do. He told us how the youth ministry consisted of 30 spoiled, rebellious church kids who wouldn't listen to us especially since we were only 19 and 20 years of age. Thankfully we had been living in the daily presence of God long enough to know that the roaring enemy had consumed this man and we felt only compassion for him and were determined that we would not let God's name and power be so defamed among this little church and this little youth ministry if we had anything to say about it.

We launched into this new Teens Unlimited ministry with all the passion and fervor and faith that we had and in just a few weeks God began to open doors and began to turn the hearts of the teens and their parents and the church to us. We were loving on the church families and praying and witnessing on the streets to teens and cleaning the church and anything else that was asked of us. We quickly began to learn about the awful truth of church politics and how churches are ran, often by people who don't resemble Jesus in the least. That was very painful, but we kept our eyes on the young people and God began to bless our efforts. We fell in love with those kids and they fell in love with us. One of the first things that I felt needed to happen was that we needed to make following Jesus as attractive as it truly is. Christianity is the greatest high, trip, and hit of all time. It is not a duty or a drudgery to hang out with and work for the God who keeps planets spinning and births and kills stars and who is the most amazing Person in existence. Jesus is better than anything! His way is the path to true joy and excitement and adventure. Those who think different don't really know Him. We showed those teens that everything they were looking for was ONLY to be found in Jesus Christ. Teenager after teenager began to turn their life

over to Christ and start reading their Bible and witnessing to their friends. Their parents by and large immediately became concerned and started putting pressure on the pastor to make sure that I knew that I was there to keep their kids from getting pregnant, on drugs, and cursing too much. They made it clear that I was not there to turn their kids into radical followers of Jesus. Thankfully, I was just too young to listen.

I was preaching every week in that youth ministry like it was a city-wide evangelistic campaign and young people and adults were coming and getting saved and committing to be followers of Jesus. I had recently read David Wilkerson's book *The Cross And The Switchblade* which touched me more deeply than I can express and I remembered how the members of the Mau Mau gang in the book wore red satin jackets with white lettering to identify themselves with the gang. I got the idea that we could do the same to identify with Christ and with Teens Unlimited. We taught a Bible study on reaching the world for Christ and then presented each teen and adult that completed the class a red satin jacket with the Teens Unlimited logo emblazoned on the back. I wrote and printed a gospel tract directed at teenagers with our logo and contact information on it and the young people started wearing their jackets to high school and handing out the tracts. Within a few months of our arrival the whole church was buzzing about Teens Unlimited.



I did some research and found out that the largest attendance the youth ministry had ever seen in the church's 100-year existence was 60 teens. I thought it would encourage and excite the class to break that record and so I promoted to the young people that if they would bring their lost friends and have over 60 young people on a certain Sunday that I would allow them to honey and feather me in my suit that Sunday after the service. It worked only too well and on the given Sunday we had 63 teenagers and since honey moves too slow the kids brought two gallons of restaurant pancake syrup and two feather pillows. The whole church gathered out in the parking lot as I was doused in syrup and then covered with the



feathers. It was all fun and games until the bees from the clover field next door to the church got a whiff of that syrup! Within a few moments I was a howling swirling mass of bees. Fortunately our little parsonage was right across the street from the church and so I made a beeline, pun intended, for the water hose in our front yard and doused myself with water as I stripped off my suit and shirt and then tore into the house leaving the bees swirling over my clothes on the front porch. It was hilarious to say the least.

Another wonderful experience was that I regularly filled in preaching when the pastor was away. One of my favorite sermons that I preached there was *Fire In The Church*. The audio for this sermon can



be found here, (<https://www.spreaker.com/user/mattbullen/fire-in-the-church>) I preached on the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Preaching on the Holy Spirit in a Baptist church? Wow, did I get in trouble for that one.

Another of my favorite sermons from that period was Make An Impact on the World for Christ. The audio can be found here, ([https://www.spreaker.com/user/mattbullen/make\\_an\\_impact\\_m4a](https://www.spreaker.com/user/mattbullen/make_an_impact_m4a)).

We had many adventures as God began to change the young people of the church and impact the youth of the city. It wasn't long before we had established Bible clubs in both high schools and teens were being

saved and getting on fire for Christ. We were interviewed on radio and television and the young people and most of their parents were excited to be a part. About this time a young newly married couple named Scott and Jaime asked us if they could join our team. The pastor warned me not to allow them because they had a "shady past" and he didn't care for them. I really liked them and they were passionate about Jesus and about teens so Lisa and I said, "We would love to have you!" in spite of the pastor's ire. We became fast friends after that and today Scott and Jaime are internationally known pastors of a mighty church in Tucson, Arizona and have been greatly used of God. I will always be grateful that I listened to the Holy Spirit and believed that God loves to use people with "shady pasts."



Also, about this time we found out about a Baptist church across the street from the largest high school in town who was shutting its doors and their 200-seat auditorium was for sale. We began to pray that we could start a youth center there and within a month or two, through a crazy miracle, it was ours and Lisa and I would go there every night after cleaning the church and would paint and remodel it. We painted red, blue, and yellow racing stripes along the walls of the auditorium. So funny, it was just this year that I realized that those are the colors and almost the configuration of the Colombian flag. They terminated at the front with a big flame and the words "Where there is no vision the people perish." We turned the previously unfinished Sunday school area of the church into a 50's diner and game-room. We would hold a mini-revival there every Friday night much like the Monday night Youth On Fire meetings that my brother and I held when we were in high school. It was on fire!

As my 7-months pregnant wife was setting up for one of these Friday night revivals and I was out in the church van picking up teenagers her water broke and we had to take her to the hospital. The doctor's said that our baby was coming 2 months premature and the hospital in Roswell couldn't handle a baby that small so they were going to fly us to Albuquerque to the hospital there. Here we



were. 19 and 20 with a baby coming this early and neither of us had ever flown on a plane before. Yet I remember so clearly that we were at perfect peace. We knew that our lives were a miracle, that we were called of God, and that He would take care of us. We got on that little medical plane and took off and our little 4 lb. 8 oz boy, Luke, was born the next day. Today he is a fine man of God with his own family and serves as the chairman of the board of our international ministry. Praise the Lord!

The next spring, to celebrate our first anniversary with the church, we decided to have a city-wide youth evangelistic campaign with a pizza blast like we had done in Springfield, MO. Scott set up TV spots and billboards and radio spots and we put up posters and flyers all over town. We packed out the church gymnasium that night and I preached my heart out. Many teens from all over the city and of varied race and societal status were saved that night.

Shortly after, to my complete shock, the pastor called me in and told me that he and the deacons were concerned about the "type" of young people that I was bringing in. He let me know that they didn't want "those people" in the church and that those kid's parents were never going to come and were never going to tithe anyway. He wanted me to "bring in the football players and the cheerleaders." I was stunned and sickened. I had received quite a bit of resistance all along from the established hierarchy of the church but because the teens and parents loved us so, the politicians were careful about confronting me. But now, I had gone too far. I was being forced out.

We were heartbroken but rejoicing in the year we had shared with this church and the lives that had been changed. We moved back home to Albuquerque wondering what God had for us there.

## **10: Save America Ministries -**

***“One lonely soul on fire with the love of God  
may set the whole universe ablaze” – L. B. Cowman***

We were very sad to leave our teenagers in Roswell, NM but we were also excited about what God had for us. My sister, Melanie, who had moved to Roswell to live with Lisa and I when she was 15 went off to Bible college and we moved back home. I had always felt that God was calling me to be an evangelist/revivalist and so I believed that this might be the time when God would bring that to pass. So, in the spring of 1987 we moved back to Albuquerque, rented a broken down little house with my younger brother, Mark, who was preparing to go to Bible college, in a neighborhood known as “the war zone” because of the crime, drugs, and gangs that lived and operated there. Five people were murdered within a block of us the year we lived there but it was what we could afford. Our neighbors were pimps, prostitutes, drug dealers, and immigrants. There was some kind of war going on around us every day.

In our youth ministry in Roswell I had become extremely close to one young man, Rusty, who didn't have a family. Rusty was my right-hand man. He led the Bible study at Goddard high school and generally spent every minute he could at our house. It killed him and us to have to leave him there. Shortly after we moved back to Albuquerque he was able to come and live with us and became like a son. We joined a church in the city and I began to work and pray to establish an evangelistic ministry. I got a few opportunities to preach here and there but things were slow and we literally lived meal to meal but Rusty, Mark, Lisa and I grew ever closer to the Lord and we were enjoying our baby, Luke and it wasn't long before our second son, Levi was born. We were so blessed to have a family!

I was reading everything I could get my hands on about revival and I concluded that I needed to go have a mountain prayer retreat so Rusty and I hiked up to the top of a mountain near my parents home. We built a lean-to with tree limbs and we camped out and spent many hours with the Lord. From one side of the peak I could see Interstate 40 snaking its way east to Texas and beyond and I prayed many a prayer during the days and nights we were up on the mountain that God would give me invitations to travel that road to preach across America. I named our ministry Save America Ministries and printed business cards and a brochure with lots of quotes from the great evangelists of the past. I even got to meet with my hero, Jerry Johnston, and share with him about what I intended to do. It wasn't long before we were packing our car and heading east on I-40 to points unknown preaching through the midwest at youth camps, Christian school graduations, church revivals or wherever God opened a door but always returning to our little house in the war zone. I was so excited and scared and excited. I acquired the addresses of over 400 churches in New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas and we prayed over and mailed a brochure and introduction letter to each one offering to come and hold a revival. I didn't receive a single reply.

Many sweet little providences continued to reveal to me that God's hand was upon our lives and He was moving us to His rhythm. Many souls trusted Christ or had a spiritual awakening in their life. One blessing that has always warmed my heart is that I prayed over a couple who had tried a long time to have a child and shortly after they conceived and gave birth to a son. Word spread and through the years I have had the blessing to pray over many couples and a remarkable number have been blessed with a child. Two of the couples named their son after me. So humbling and thrilling!



Some thought we were crazy and there were plenty of people telling me that I was not being responsible and getting an education and getting a good job and settling down now that I had a baby and one on the way but I just couldn't see any fruit in their lives that would make me want to listen to them. Soon our second little boy was born and we were so thrilled.

Every time I came back home to the war zone I would get convicted that my own neighborhood and city needed Christ and I began to pray and to witness to people in our neighborhood. Ever since I had come to Christ I had made a habit of sometimes praying late at night on a mountain, in the woods, or in a city park. One night I went to pray at Trumbull Park in the war zone. Trumbull Park was where everything bad happened in the war zone. Drug deals, gang wars, etc. In fact we called it Rumble Park when I was a teenager. So I am walking and praying in the park at about 2 a.m. and this huge guy comes up to me with a huge knife and tells me he is going to gut me. I looked him straight in the eye and I said, "If God wants you to do that you can, but if He doesn't want you to, I am invincible until God is through with me." I was as serious as sin and he could tell. His eyes got big and he said, "You mean you are not afraid of me?" He waved that big blade in my face and slashed like he was going to cut me. I said, "No, I know that I'm invincible until God is through with me and if He is through with me on this earth and He allows you to kill me then you are just going to send me straight into the arms of my Lord and to my reward. What is there to be afraid of?" He just stared at me for a minute and then he put that big knife away and he said, "You've got to come to my house and talk to my grandmother about this." I said, "Are you sure? It's 2 a.m. I wouldn't want to wake her up." He shook his head, "No, she will want to be awakened to hear this. She loves this kind of stuff. She is always trying to push God on me and telling me to clean up my life." So off to his house we went and woke up his grandmother and it turned out she was a Jehovah's Witness but she was so impressed that her son had listened to me and brought me home they both asked me to tell them about Jesus and we had a revival meeting in their living room until the sun came up. God began to break my heart for the war zone. I fell in love with the place and the people.

I was still preaching wherever God opened a door and souls were coming to Christ everywhere we went. We were still living meal to meal but we never went hungry. One time we rolled into Oklahoma City, OK to preach at a large church with 75 cents to our name. The church secretary explained that we could get a hotel room, eat at the diner across the street, and at the end of the week the church would reimburse us plus an honorarium. I blushed and explained that we only had 75 cents to our name and no credit card. She smiled, made some calls, and told us the room was covered and our meals were covered. We were so relieved and praised God. It was a wonderful week of ministry. My brother went to Bible college and Rusty followed him not long after and for a little while it was just our little family. I was blessed a few years later to be Rusty's best man at his wedding. They had 3 sons and Rusty preached for 30 years, died young, and is now in heaven. Mark is still in ministry today.

About this time the youth pastor at the church we were attending took a pastorate in another city and the pastor asked me if I would take over the youth group. We prayed about it and felt that this was an invitation from God. The next Sunday we met our 19 young people that we were to shepherd. We began to put our heart and soul into these young people and God began to move. We named the youth group, yes you guessed it, Teens Unlimited and I had some business cards printed with these words across the bottom "Albuquerque's Fastest Growing Youth Outreach". And the ministry began to grow like crazy. Lisa and I and our babies would be out all week winning young people to Christ on the streets and then bringing them in on Sunday. My burden for the war zone continued to grow and I was constantly praying.

One evening Lisa and I were driving down the street to our house and I saw a group of punk rockers on the corner. I had never seen anything like these teenagers before. They were all dressed in black leather

with punk rock band patches all over them. One of the boys had a mohawk that stood at least 9" straight up from his head and the rest of his head was shaved.

One of the other boys had his haired glued in spikes like the statue of Liberty and the rest of his head was shaved. The girls all had heavy black eyeliner and black lipstick. I looked at them and laughed out loud and made a comment like, "look at those freaks" as I drove on by. Immediately I was devastatingly convicted in my spirit and I felt the Lord say to me, "Don't laugh at them. You think I love you more than I love them? You have been praying to Me for the war zone, well son, they are the war zone. They only look like that because they are lost and they are trying to find what only I can give them." Rarely in my life have I felt such a clear impression from the Holy Spirit. I drove around the block and came back around to where they were standing. I pulled up and rolled down my window and asked them if they would come to Teens Unlimited with us on Friday night. We had a Friday night youth revival service and fun activity every week. To my utter amazement they said, "Sure, that sounds cool." I found out that the two boys names were Count and Adam. I gave them all one of my business cards and we agreed to pick them up on that same spot-on Friday night. As we drove away, I was humbled, scared, and elated all at the same time. I doubted they would be there on Friday night, but I was glad that I had obeyed the still small voice of the Spirit. To my utter amazement when I pulled up there on Friday night there they stood with 6 more of their friends all dressed the same way. We packed them into our car and headed off to the church. Miraculously, no one else showed up that night which was highly unusual because we normally had 30-40 youths back then on a Friday night.



I'll never forget one of the punk girls named Janice. She was Count's girlfriend and had a spider web painted across one side of her face with eyeliner. She had spiked jet black hair and a black miniskirt, and she was scary. Janice was perhaps the hardest hearted 15-year-old girl I had ever met. She was venomous in her hatred of God and His men. She told me so in language that would make a sailor blush. She stared a hole through me as I preached the gospel that night until it made me very uncomfortable. She was not happy about being there that night but the rest of the teens listened intently and when I urged them to trust Christ, one of the girls had tears in her eyes. We had a great evening and, on the way, home I invited them to come with me on Sunday

and they all said, "Cool." Sure enough the next Sunday they were there waiting and ready to go and you can only imagine the looks that I got from the church when I walked in with those 7 or 8 teens in tow. Oh my. But I was as happy as I could be because I knew that God was doing it and not me. On the way home that day I learned that Count and Adam's father was in prison. Their mother had been in jail and they had run away from foster care. Their mom was now out of jail and living a few houses down from us. She worked two jobs and so they were on their own. I also found out they hadn't eaten in a couple of days, no wonder they were so skinny and deathly white, and they were planning to go dumpster diving, which I had never heard of, behind the McDonald's on the corner after church. I invited them to come home and have lunch with us and they hungrily accepted. My sweet wife cooked everything we had in the house, food that was supposed to last us through the next week, and they ate every bit of it. I had never seen a truly hungry person eat and it was eye opening. We realized that day, we could talk about

Jesus all we wanted if we loved them and fed them because they were absolutely starving for both and so we did. It was amazing how they would show up at our house every night around dinner time with some theological question for me to answer. And of course, we always invited them to eat with us. They had some pretty crazy theological questions for me too. Like one day Adam was at our house and he says to me, "Brother Matt, I want you to tell me if you think this is a sin. You see the guys and I go up to the gay bar on the corner and all the guys hide around behind the bar and they send me in cause I'm the best looking and I get friendly with some old gay guy and pretend like he can take me home and then when we walk out to the parking lot the guys and I roll him for his wallet and run off. Now that's not a sin right Brother Matt because God hates gays too, right? Wow! Talk about discipleship. These boys and girls stretched me to the limit sometimes. Of course, I carefully explained that hurting and/or stealing from any of God's creation was a sin.

I was out praying on my porch one night and I saw Adam walking down the street picking up cigarette butts, lighting them, taking a few puffs, and lighting the next one because they had no money for cigarettes. I was appalled. Nothing in my experience to that point had prepared me to fathom that kind of desperation so I went to the store and bought a pack of cigarettes and I gave them to Adam. I just knew I was going to hell for contributing to his demise but it hurt me so bad to see him smoking those nasty butts off the street. He was so excited about that pack of cigarettes. He would smoke three or four puffs from one and then put it out and put it back in the pack to save it for later to make them last as long as he could. He asked me to hang on to them because everyone else would steal them. So every night he would come down and have a smoke on my porch and I would talk to him about Jesus and that's how I won him to Christ. Eventually he got saved, his little sister, Laura, got saved and started winning her friends to Christ.

About this time Adam's brother, Count, came to me and told me that his girlfriend, Janice, the scary 15-year-old hard-hearted girl was pregnant and that her parents had kicked her out on the street and could she please stay with us. Lisa and I said, "of course" but inside we were scared. We had a "hide a be couch" in our tiny living room and we made it up for Janice. I'll never forget as long as I live the fact that she stayed with us for over a week and she never spoke a word to us. Not one. The first night I asked her if it would be ok if we went ahead and had our normal family worship and would she sit in? She never looked at me just moved to the side of the bed and sat through our family worship. We were begging God to save Janice. One night, I couldn't take it anymore, and Lisa and I sat up half the night literally preaching the gospel to Janice and pleading with her to come to Christ. She sat there the whole time looking at the floor and never said a word. The next day she was gone. She and Count had stolen a car and ran away to California. We never saw Count again. I was heartbroken and I remember complaining to the Lord that I really wanted to save Janice and I wasn't happy that I had failed.

Three years later, Lisa and I had been through some major disappointments with churches and ministry. We were at the possibly lowest point of our lives and were debating whether to ever be involved in ministry again. We were walking out of Walmart and this beautiful young woman with long brown hair a nice dress came running up shouting, "Brother Matt, Brother Matt and threw her arms around me." I was stunned. I didn't know who she was. I was looking at Lisa with a shrug like, "I don't know what's going on here." After a huge hug she pulled away and said, "Don't you remember me?" "It's Janice." "I stayed on your couch and you told me about Jesus." Lisa and I were shocked. We both grabbed her and hugged her and then she began to tell us that she had given her life to Christ and that she was living back at home and had reconciled with her parents and she was soon to be married to a preacher in her church. We were overjoyed! She had started a craft business and was in front of Walmart selling her wares. She ran over and picked up a clock that she had made that looked like a woman's summer straw hat. She brought

it back and handed it to us and said some of the sweetest words that I will probably ever hear in this life. She said, "I hope that every time you look at this clock you will be reminded that what you are doing is making a difference in people's lives. You may not think they are listening but they are. You may not think that your love is touching them but it is. Please never quit." We hugged again and walked away with tears streaming down our faces. Janice is still serving the Lord today. It was a kiss on the cheek from heaven.

But back to the war zone. One day I was walking down our street and I recognized two captains from the gang "South Side Locos", Anthony and John. My brother had witnessed to Anthony years before and Anthony had even stayed with Mark for awhile. I could tell that they had been on the street for awhile. I stopped and invited them to come home with me and have something to eat and clean up. They happily agreed and they moved in and became part of our family. Eventually other gang members came to live with us too. So we traded a house full of punk rockers for a house full of Latin gang members. My dear sweet wife always welcomed in every soul that I brought home and somehow we never went hungry. We did add water to the milk sometimes and the lights and the gas got shut off pretty regularly but we always found a way to get them turned back on. God was teaching us so much and we were just walking through the doors that He opened in front of us. Anthony eventually became my right hand man at Teens Unlimited and stayed with us for a couple of years. And today, Anthony is a mighty man of God.

Lisa and I had our third baby, a daughter named Rebekah, which means enchanting beauty, and no man was ever more excited to be the daddy of a daughter than me. Her first night home from the hospital she slept through the night on my chest and she has owned my heart ever since.

An opportunity opened up for us to go to Dallas, Texas and have a booth at a God Save America Conference. I created a poster with the Save America Ministries logo, which was the outline of the United States with a large flame leaping out of it, and brochures and information about our ministry. On the 12 hour trip our car engine began to go out. We made it and had a wonderful conference, met many people, and were blessed to share about our vision. The night before the last day of the conference, there was an all-night prayer meeting. I attended and we cried out to God all night long, then attended the all-day conference, then left that night to drive all night home to Albuquerque. I was so sure that I was strong enough to go 36 hours without sleep but only by the pure grace of God did we make it home. I was so sleepy, I would stop at every truck stop and buy coffee and a cup of ice. I would open my shirt and pour the cup of ice down my neck and drive but very soon I would be drifting off the road with my wife and babies sound asleep in the car. I would stop the car, get out, run around, hop back in and take off again. Eventually, the coffee wasn't helping so I would purposely pour scalding coffee in my lap to wake myself up. The car engine was smoking and overheating terribly and I thought I was going to die but we had no money to stop. We had to get home. Purely by God's grace, we made it home safely. The car never ran again. We never received a single invitation for ministry from that conference but we sure did try.



One Sunday my pastor came to me at church and said that a church in Tucumcari, New Mexico was without a pastor and they needed an interim pastor until a permanent one could be found. I was thrilled. The next Sunday we loaded up our little car and headed east on I-40 to Tucumcari 3 hours away to preach. It was the sweetest little church and amazingly enough the man, who had given us the \$20 dollars a few years before when we ran out of gas in Tucumcari, went to church there. I ended up preaching there every Sunday for several months. It was a blessed time.

One Sunday on the way home our car broke down in the middle of the desert an hour and a half from any size town. We were heart sick.

We had our baby daughter, Rebekah, with us and it was blazing hot outside and this was before the days of cell phones. We were really in trouble. We said a quick and desperate prayer and I stepped out of the car to see what I could do but I knew the engine was blown. I no more than stepped out and closed the door and a big silver Cadillac pulled up with a white-haired couple in it and asked us if we were ok and needed any help. I explained our situation and they said they were going right by our house in Albuquerque and they would be glad to take us. Lisa and I looked at each other in amazement and climbed into their air-conditioned car with leather seats. We took off and began to tell them about ourselves. "Turns out" they were very familiar with the college that Lisa and I had met at and even knew many of our friends there. The grandmotherly woman held our baby and we talked about the Lord all the way home. The hour and a half seemed like 10 minutes and when they dropped us off at our house and we said goodbye Lisa and I turned and looked at each other and at the same time we both said, "Angels, uh huh." out loud. We shook our heads and said it again, "Angels, uh huh." Then we went in the house praising God.

What else was God up to???



# 11: Punk Rock Church -

*“Because the church has lost Holy Ghost fire, men go to hell-fire!” – Leonard Ravenhill*

Soon I was asked by the pastor to go on staff full time as youth pastor / church janitor for \$1200.00 a month. We were ecstatic! I talked my brother Mark, who had just been married, to move back to Albuquerque and help me as co-youth pastor. He agreed and we set out to build the city’s largest youth ministry and change the world. But very shortly, Mark and his wife got homesick for her family in Illinois and so they moved back there to plant a church.

The ministry continued to grow dramatically. Those church teens got excited too and started winning their friends to Christ and bringing them and before long we had gone from 19 teens to 200. We started Bible clubs in several high schools. We revived the red satin jackets, went street preaching, had youth rallies, and went on inner city mission ventures. One night, my Teens Unlimited gang and I decided that the band, Bon Jovi had gathered hundreds of people together so I could preach to them and I did until I was physically carried off by Bon Jovi’s bodyguards because I was preaching and handing out tracts with some of my young preacher boys in front of one of their concerts. Hundreds of teens gave their life to Christ. I would baptize 5 to 10 young people every Friday night at our youth revival service. Many of them are in some form of ministry today.



The stories are endless but I will share three of my favorites.

First, I still had the bug to do old fashioned itinerant revival ministry and so I loaded up our little family. Luke was 3, Levi was, 2 and Bekah was 6 months old. We loaded up with several of our teens in a church bus and spent two weeks going throughout Texas, Kansas, and Oklahoma preaching in churches and singing and challenging the young and the old alike to live for God. It was the most wonderful trip ever.

Second, an inner-city ministry that owned a youth camp in the mountains invited us to bring all of our inner-city teens free for a week-long summer camp with lots of activities



and preaching every night. Lisa and I and our team put the word out on the street in the war zone and all over town about this free camp. On the day we were to leave we drove through the war zone with our big old church bus and I was so delighted to see our teens and lots of faces I had never seen before stream out of those shacks and projects with a few clothes and maybe a blanket to go to summer camp. It was surreal seeing these gangsters and hoods excited about going to camp. It was a wild week as they rode horses, played capture the flag, ate and ate, and listened to a fiery evangelist each night preach the gospel. One of those young men is pastor of large church in Albuquerque today. Praise Jesus.



The third story is one of the highlights of my life. I wanted to have a real live city-wide youth evangelistic meeting like Jerry Johnston had in Albuquerque back when I was in high school but I wanted to preach at this one. So we planned it all out. We got a loan from the bank to buy hundreds of large pizzas for the free event. We printed tickets, posters, flyers, and bumper stickers. Miraculously, we received free TV and radio spots and a really good deal on billboards all over town. But most importantly, we prayed like crazy. For weeks leading up to the event I would walk to the park and pray for hours, sometimes all night begging God to touch my city like I had been asking Him since I was 16 years old. A few days before the event the pastor of the church asked me how many people I thought might be coming. I said that our goal was 500. He snickered and informed me that the largest attendance ever in the history of the church was 600 and that was for a nationally known preacher so not to set my hopes too high. After he walked away my dear wife walked up to me and said, "Matthew, the Lord has shown me this week that we are going to have 1000 teens here." Like any good husband, I smiled, patted her hand, and said, "That's great honey but after what the preacher just told me, we should probably plan for 400." She meekly but earnestly requested, "Do you mind if I go ahead and have the team set up for 1000 just in case?" I reluctantly agreed, "Sure. That can't hurt."

The night of the event, October 21, 1989, I couldn't bear to look until the last minute so I stayed upstairs in the youth room with the lights off. I took my shoes off and laid prostrate on the floor praying until they came and told me that it was time to start. I had told everyone that I didn't want to know how it was going until I walked out on the platform to preach because I wanted to stay focused on my message. When they came to get me the people who were walking me to the auditorium were white as ghosts and uncharacteristically quiet. They simply said, "You need come see this" and I thought, "Oh no, this is going to be bad." I'll never forget stepping through the door and onto the platform and seeing 1200 teenagers crammed into that auditorium. As I am typing this, my heart is in my throat, I can feel the butterflies, and tears are filling my eyes. I climbed through teenagers and stepped into the only little spot left in the whole auditorium, a little spot right in front of the podium. I told my story of how lost and alone I was and how Jesus pursued me and how he changed my life 7 years before and how wonderful it was to serve Him. It didn't feel like much but it was all I had. Audio of that sermon can be found here, (<https://www.spreaker.com/episode/5629869>) I invited those who wanted to give their life to Christ to come forward and the aisles flooded with hundreds of young people. Teenagers were all over the altar and up onto the platform at my feet praying to receive Christ. I had to back up to the choir loft. Hundreds

confessed Christ that night and we baptized scores of them the next Sunday morning. After the service the teens went out into our gymnasium and consumed over 300 large pizzas. Lisa had called the 4 pizza places earlier that day that we had contracted with to shut down their stores that night to make pizza just for our event and told them to have enough pizza for 1000 teenagers and we did. I went back upstairs to that dark youth room and danced for hours and threw my shoes up in the air and praised God for answered prayer. It was one of the greatest days of my life.

But, there is always a spiritual battle going on behind the scenes in any successful ministry and shortly after the Pizza Blast I was called in by the senior pastor and told that my vision didn't match his vision. He told me that he "didn't want to be Punk Rock Baptist Church, that my vision for the street kids was more fitting for a para-church ministry or something." He told me that his vision was "to have 30 cream of the crop teens and that he felt that the Holy Spirit was leading me elsewhere" and I was fired. I was not to share with anyone why I was leaving and especially I wasn't to tell the parents and teenagers. I was to leave quietly. I felt like all the blood had drained out of my body as I walked out of his office. I was 24-years-old and I was devastated. The next Sunday when I tried to go to the youth room and tell the teens goodbye I found the pastor had stationed men there with instructions not to allow me to speak to the teens. When they realized that I was ready to fist fight if they didn't let me pass, they stepped aside and I was able to say goodbye to my teenagers and try to explain a little but it was pretty ugly. The saddest thing was that we had a separate service on Sunday afternoons for our inner-city teens from the war zone that ran about 80 teens per week and that afternoon my phone started ringing and the teens from the war zone started telling me that the service had been cancelled permanently and that the church buses had left our 80 teens standing on the street corner with their Bibles and they were told to go home. Anytime there is a move God, there is also a move of Satan and usually he comes wrapped in religion.

My wife and I had never felt pain like that before. We were shell shocked. Our life stopped. Our income stopped. And our hearts nearly stopped. My brother had started a church in Pekin, Illinois and we put our stuff in storage and headed out for Illinois to try and help them with their church but we were dead inside. We were living in my sister-in-law's grandmother's basement and my brother and his wife were living upstairs with Grandma. We were working three jobs. Lisa and I would work at the church all day remodeling the old building, then we would catch a few hours sleep, then leave our sleeping children in the basement where my sister-in-law would check on them periodically, and go load up our van with newspapers at 1 a.m. and deliver them to the paperboys in all the little towns around Peoria, Illinois until 6 a.m. Then we would drive 75 miles to Bloomington, Illinois where we had a job cleaning a Pharmore Store just trying to make ends meet. We would finish that by 9 a.m. then drive 75 miles back and continue working on the church. It only took a few weeks of that schedule and our broken hearts for us to completely melt down. One night we came into the basement and my brother had left a letter on our bed informing us that he thought we should go back home and get some financial integrity and that we were no longer welcome to stay in the basement. I tore the letter into little pieces and threw them on the floor, packed up our 3 children and my pregnant wife and I drove from Peoria, Illinois to Albuquerque, New Mexico, 32 hours straight without stopping, except for gas. Half way home, I stopped at an old burned out gas station, got out of the van, looked up into the sky, and regrettably said, "Lord, Your way is too hard for me. I'm going home, getting a job, working and taking care of my family. If and when You want me to do something else, You have my phone number."

We lived on my mother's living room floor in her apartment for 3 months until we could get our own apartment. I went to work laying railroad ties for \$5.00 per hour during the day and vacuuming offices at night for \$3.80 an hour and I felt like Samson grinding in the mill but I couldn't figure out what I had done wrong. I knew God didn't fail me, and I knew my brother was a good man, and I had loved and looked up

to my pastor who fired me so it must have been something wrong with me. It was about this time we had our fourth baby, Beverly. I was so happy. I started to think about all the pastors I knew, including the one who had just fired me, and all the missionaries I knew, whose children were living for the Devil and I decided that God had given me a wonderful wife and 4 precious little children to disciple and to provide for and I was going to pour myself into being a good provider, a godly husband, and a great dad and I was going to tuck away all those dreams of saving the world and simply hope that perhaps one of my kids would someday fulfill that dream in my place.

I decided I was going to focus on building a godly family...

## 12: Warriors For Christ -

*“Nothing but fire kindles fire.” – Phillips Brooks*



We had lain down, temporarily at least, our wild ideas of turning the world upside down for Christ. I was working, we had an apartment, and all of our friends, in-laws, and other family were happy that we had “wised up” and were submitting to the status quo of the culture. However, there was still a subversive fire burning in our bones and so we devised a plan for our life. I would work hard at whatever work God sent me during the day and at night Lisa and I would get educated theologically so that we could educate our children to be warriors for Christ. I told Lisa that for every book she read on Christian womanhood, child rearing, women’s ministry, or prayer and wrote a report on the book, I would buy her a new dress. So about two days later I came home from my \$5.00 per hour job and she had already read a weighty book and written a beautiful report. I couldn’t believe it! How was I going to buy her a dress? I began, like Laban in the Bible, to change her “wages” seven times but she smilingly assured me that she never intended to take me up on my dress deal. She was as committed to our vision of knowing God and preparing our little family to impact the kingdom as I was and she needed no additional incentive but the joy of pursuing God as a family. Within that

month she had read 5 books and written reports. I couldn’t keep up with her reading, but I tried hard.

One day when our oldest, Luke, was about to be school age I came home and told Lisa, “I am not sending my kids to these New Mexico schools. The only thing I learned there was self defense. We are going to keep our kids home and teach them ourselves.” We had never heard of homeschooling so you can imagine my wife’s response. I told her that everything man has ever learned is in a book somewhere and all we have to do is teach them to read. She was incredulous but agreed to start teaching them at home. We didn’t have a TV so we spent nearly every evening reading. Every morning she would gather the children around our little table and memorize scripture with them. I bought her a blackboard to put on the wall in our dining nook and when they had mastered a verse by memory she would write the verse on the board. Each day they would review the verses on the board and then begin the process of memorizing a new one. I was working very hard to keep the wolves away from the door and not paying too much attention to the blackboard until one day I stopped and noticed that there were over 40 verses written on that little blackboard. I couldn’t believe it! I asked Lisa, “Do you mean to tell me that you and the children have memorized over 40 verses of scripture?” “Yes”, she replied and quickly to prove her point had the children recite from memory all 43 verses. I was stunned and thrilled. They were 7, 6, 5, and 3-years-old and our 5th baby, Brooke, was an infant. It wasn’t long before they were reciting whole chapters of the Bible from memory.

In our Bible College days, I had preached at a youth rally in Indianapolis, Indiana and the daughter of an evangelist was in the crowd and was impacted by the sermon. Somehow I was told that her father was working on a curriculum for something called Home Schooling. He was gathering Christian educators from all around the country to collaborate on it which intrigued me greatly. Later I learned that he had completed it and it was available for purchase. We checked with the laws of our state, New Mexico, and learned that homeschooling was illegal, but ordered the curriculum and began home schooling our children anyway. We didn't know another homeschooling family but believed it was God's plan for our family. Later our kids would tell us that for years they thought we invented home schooling! In the years to come we fought with other home schooling families to make it legal in all 50 states. It didn't turn out to be the quid pro quo, fool proof, method of raising warriors for Christ that we had hoped but we are still glad that we educated them ourselves all the way through high school. We eventually built up a library in our home of over 7,000 volumes, many of which our children had read before they graduated from high school. History, theology, biography, Christian living, science, classics, and of course some good old fiction kept us captivated day in and day out year upon year and God was deepening us individually and as a family and preparing us for adventures we couldn't have imagined at the time. Even today, though our children are in their 20's and 30's and are scattered all over the world, we read a book or two per month together and share our insights, comments, and delights from each book in a secret Facebook group we affectionately call Bullen Book Club.

Many were the months that we didn't know where the rent would come from but God always provided. There was a large rock outcropping in the mountain foot hills near our apartment complex and I would often go there late at night and cry out to God to provide for my little family. I was working at everything that I could find. Some months the Lord saw fit to let us really be tested. I even spent a night in jail once because our tags were expired on our old ford van that I used for work. But even then I witnessed to the officer that arrested me and everyone in the jail that I was raising 5 warriors for Christ on one laborers income and sometimes buying milk came ahead of renewing my registration. I'm sure we made many mistakes but we were two kids in our mid 20's with 5 children and a religious conviction against food stamps and welfare and we were doing our best to figure out how to make it all work. God always sent us what we needed when we needed it though and that included encouragement. We lived in a second story apartment and a couple and their 3 teenagers moved in down below us. We began to notice how mature and how sweet and respectful their children were and it wasn't long before we met them and discovered that they were Christians and that they homeschooled! Wow! Our first encounter with another homeschooling family! They were much farther down the road than us and so John and Kim took us under their wings and mentored us for the rest of the time that we lived there. They were radical! They lived in an apartment so they could use their funds for missions! They were unbelievably wise and encouraging and we owe them an eternal debt of gratitude for letting us know that rather than being crazy, we were actually on the right track. John and Kim and their children are still dear friends today and staunch supporters of our ministry. God is good.

It wasn't all work though. We had a motto that we worked hard and we played hard. I doubt any young dad ever enjoyed his children more than me. Many were the nights that the water ran down the walls of our apartment as we had water fights. You could always count on getting blasted with a rubber band or cold water dumped on you in the shower or something around our place. Many weekends the older 3 children worked with me on moonlighting construction jobs. I found out later that they would endure the hard hours of labor because I always bought them breakfast burritos on the way to work. We were strict and demanded a lot from our kids but we had tons of fun too and it is the greatest joy of my life that today we are very close and there is deep love and respect in our family and we have the incredible blessing of working together in ministry around the world. But that is later in the story. The other wonderful thing

that happened during this time was even though we were not in any organized type of ministry, God sent an unending stream of people to our door to be won to Christ, disciplined or encouraged. Our dinner table became our pulpit and our home became a place of refuge for the downcast.

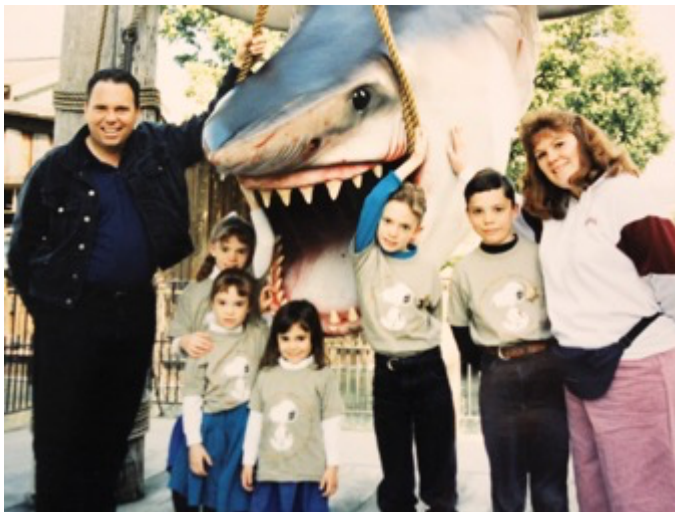


## 13: A Path To Our Door -

***“We who want to witness to the presence of God’s Spirit in the world need to tend the fire within with utmost care... Our first and foremost task is faithfully to care for the inward fire so that when it is really needed it can offer warmth and light to lost travelers.”***

***– Henri J. M. Nouwen***

Though in our hearts we had given up on being "in the ministry" during this period as I worked and Lisa homeschooled our children, God in His goodness began to bring people to our door on a regular basis who were hurting, needed counseling, wanted to be saved, or needed a meal. We quickly began to realize the kingdom of God was much bigger than any institutional church, denomination, or organized ministry. Just when we thought we were "out of the ministry", real, miraculous, ministry began to happen all around us. Every week our little apartment was full of families that needed discipleship, the lost who needed to be found, teenagers seeking God, and folks that just needed a friend. We began to realize that God could bring the whole world to our dinner table if we were prepared, prayed up, and ready to meet their needs through Jesus. That aspect of our ministry has never left us. Over the years literally thousands have sat at our dinner table and been ministered to. Many people in ministry and serving God in local churches around the world today were saved, encouraged, or counseled in our home. Praise the Lord!



One story in particular still amazes me when I think of those days. I had moved up to being a commercial construction superintendent for a major company in Albuquerque, New Mexico. I had a young foreman named Jenó. As was my known practice, I had spied Jenó among my laborers as having leadership potential and I made him my foreman. I took him under my wing and began teaching him to be a future superintendent. Over the years I had done this many times and almost always the mutual respect and affection that grew between us eventually allowed me to share Jesus with these different foremen. I'll never forget the day that as we were inspecting a trench that was ready for concrete, Jenó asked me what made me different, what

made me so loving. I told him my story of how I came to Christ and my passion for following Jesus and right there in that trench Jenó asked me to help him get saved. We prayed right there and then. I went home and told Lisa the exciting news and we prayed for Jenó that night. I was shocked the next morning as Jenó came bounding up to me glowing and telling me that he had gone home that night and shared with his wife word for word as best as he could remember everything I had told him and that she had given her heart to Jesus as well. I was stunned and thrilled. Jenó and his wife started going to church and before long he was promoted in the company and I didn't see him on a daily basis as I had before. One night about a year later Jenó called me excited out of his mind. He asked me to get Lisa on the phone and he put his wife on the phone so the four of us could hear. Then Jenó informed me that he and his wife had decided to both quit their jobs and they were leaving the next morning with a U-haul to head

to Bible college and begin their life of ministry together and they wanted to thank us for leading them to Jesus and inspiring them to serve God with their whole life. You are an amazing God... Simply amazing...

Another wonderful thing was taking place in our home as we ministered to these myriad of people week in and week out. Our children were observing and listening and learning to serve. When they were a little older we taught them to cook and clean and serve and babysit the small children of the families that came through our door knowing this would give mom and dad more "ministry time" with the parents. Our children took this on as part of their work to impact the kingdom and that servant's heart is characteristic of them to this day. Little did we realize how God would someday impact the world through the families that he brought to our door and through our children who watched and learned and served.

We continued to struggle as I worked to climb the commercial construction ladder and Lisa poured herself into teaching and training the children. At one point things got so crazy that we were homeless for a little while and we stayed in a pay by the week motel room with 5 children and only two beds in the same room. But we always made it fun. We pretended that we were on a secret mission and we had to keep on the move. The children knew it was all in fun but it was so much better than worrying about our conditions.

Eventually, in the summer of 1999 we were blessed through a series of miracles and very hard work to buy 4 acres of land in a beautiful valley in the mountains east of Albuquerque, New Mexico. We camped on the land one whole summer clearing trees and putting in the septic system and pouring footings and that fall we put a big extra double wide mobile home on the land and moved in. It was our first real home after 15 years of marriage. Our oldest was 14 and our youngest was 7. We absolutely loved it! But very soon we realized that we as a family had grown quite accustomed to hospitality and the ministry that regularly happened in our home and now we lived at the end of a dirt road in the middle of nowhere and we were very lonely. It wasn't long however, before God heard our hearts yearning and began once again to beat a path to our door. One day our closest neighbor came by and invited us to a little church in the mountains about 5 miles away.

We gladly took him up on the invitation not realizing that some of the dearest friends of our lifetime awaited us there as well as a pastor whose one visit to our home a few weeks later would change our lives forever.

## **14: Exporting The Blessing -**

***“Preaching is theology coming through a man who is on fire”  
– Martyn Lloyd-Jones***

It was early 2000 and at the invitation of our nearest neighbor, we visited this little mountain church and immediately fell in love with the church, the people, the pastor and his wife. Shortly after our first visit we invited the pastor and his wife over for lunch. In our usual fashion we visited with them while the children cooked and served and then we sat around and the children shared stories and testimonies of what God meant to each of them. The pastor and his wife were completely blown away. After a beautiful afternoon of fellowship, they said goodbye and as they were leaving the pastor pulled me aside and said, “Matt, you have something very very special here in this family that you guys are raising. What God is doing here in your home needs to be exported to the world. You need to export this blessing that God has given you. Can I challenge you in the next year to have as many families from our church over to your home as possible so that they can experience what we experienced today and feel what we felt today and be inspired to raise up a generation of warriors for Christ?” I was stunned. I promised him that we would do exactly that and when I went back in and explained to the family what he had told me, we pulled out the church directory and a calendar and began to formulate a plan to have every family in the church over for dinner in the next 12 months and started praying like crazy. In that one moment of encouragement from that pastor a flame was lit in our hearts to be a catalyst for Christian family renewal and inspiration and a ministry of hospitality exploded.

Week after week, chicken dinner after chicken dinner, we began to build relationships with all of the families in the church and God began to do amazing things in us and through us. First, we built some of the greatest friendships of our lives that remain as bulwarks in our family to this day. Second, we began to study even harder than we had before about godly family and marriage so that we could grow ourselves and also counsel and disciple others. We did end up having nearly every family in the church over for dinner in the next two years and we, and I would like to think the church, were never the same again. We also began to loan out books and tapes from our significant family library and the results were so stunning that we began to buy two and three of everything in our library to give away or lend to our steady stream of hungry souls God was sending to our dinner table.

My health had been dramatically deteriorating for a couple of years and we couldn't figure it out. I was only 35 years old but was functioning like a 70-year-old man. Finally the doctors told me I had Systemic Lupus and it was incurable. They put me on 11 different medications and within two years I was almost dead. I could barely walk and spent more time in bed than out and that blessed little church and group of friends loved and cared for us amazingly. God only allowed us to enjoy that heavenly mountain valley and church and friends for 3 years and then He moved us to Houston, Texas in a most miraculous way. Even though I was terribly sick, I was still rocketing up in the commercial construction world and eventually caught the attention of the largest construction company in America and through a series of providences that made it clear God was at work, I was recruited to build a \$220,000,000 Hilton hotel in Houston, Texas to be completed in time for the 2004 NFL Super Bowl. So we loaded up and moved to Houston. All the while we felt strongly that God was not primarily moving us here for construction but that it was only the carrot to get us here for some yet unforeseen kingdom plan. And we were not wrong.

Within a few weeks of settling down in Houston we “stumbled” onto a little church plant that was 3 weeks old and immediately fell in love with the people there. Within a week or two we had rolled up our sleeves

and dove in. In no time at all the church had 30 families attending regularly and you guessed it, we put into action a plan to have each family over for dinner and love on them and minister to them in any way we could including exposing them to our now mammoth family lending library. We jumped at every chance to do any job in the church no matter how small and we had never been happier.

By pure grace, God's blessing upon me in my career was stunning. Out of 1200 workers on that hotel project I was voted the #1 most productive even though the pain from Lupus was intense daily. I oversaw 20 floors of this 25 story hotel and we finished the project just in time for the NFL to move in for the 2004 Super Bowl.

One weekend however, in the spring of 2004, changed my life forever. As we now had risen to leadership in the church we were sent off to a Christian retreat called Tres Dias as part of our leadership training. I went with an open mind and heart to see what God had for me but in my wildest dreams I could never have imagined the impact this one weekend would have on me for the rest of my life. I can't explain exactly what or how but Jesus met me on that weekend so miraculously that I can only say that it was every bit as impactful as that youth camp in the summer of 1982. I came home a man aflame once again. Apparently, God did know my phone number and He called. If you had asked me, before that weekend, if I was on fire for God, I probably would have said yes but time, trouble, disappointments, illness and the cares of this life had dampened my flame more than I realized. That weekend God blew through my soul with a fresh wind and fanned an inferno that burns brightly to this day. I came home from that weekend with a three part vision. 1. I knew God wanted me to pastor. 2. I knew God wanted me to write a book about godly family. 3. I knew God wanted me to begin speaking at homeschool conferences and challenging parents to raise warriors for Christ.

Shortly after, I became one of the pastors of this booming church of now 300 people, we began to write



our book, *The Blessed Family*, and I became a regular speaker at the annual Southeast Texas Homeschool Association state conference. Later I would also write a monthly article called *Dad's Corner* for *The Teaching Pioneer Magazine*. I loved preaching more than ever and like days gone by I enjoyed the Holy Spirit's power and help but in even stronger ways than when I was a youth. It was thrilling what God was doing all around us. I was still sick much of the time, still building high rise buildings all over Texas, and still ministering to people three and four nights a week at our dinner table but by this time we had an army of precious warriors and best friends in our 5 teenagers who now did all of the work, including our two sons studying theology and working for me building high rises.

Then God called us, with our pastor's blessing, to start a church in our living room because we weren't busy enough!

Within 8 weeks the new church was running over 100 people in our living room. Our neighbors were very thankful when we moved into a building and shortly after were running 300.

Those were amazing years of hard construction and ministry work but we loved every minute of it. I learned how and built a website to promote our book and here is a glimpse of some of the events we spoke at in 2007 that were posted on that website.

February 8, 2007 Grace Family Homeschool Support Group, Spring, TX

April 23-25, 2007 Strong Families Innovation Alliance, Scottsdale, AZ

June 8-9, 2007 Southeast Texas Homeschool Association Summer Conference, Houston, TX

August 4, 2007 Sugar Creek Back To School Conference, Sugar Land, TX

August 16-18, 2007 7th Annual Texas Homeschool Coalition, The Woodlands, TX

September 28-30, 2007 Tres Dias Men's Retreat, Trinity, TX

October 26-27, 2007 First Annual Grace Family Integrated Church Conference, Spring, TX

Through some miraculous circumstances our family was part of a think-tank strategizing with the leaders of some of the largest churches in America about how to raise up the next generation of warriors for Christ. Lisa and I were also speaking and serving at Tres Dias weekends twice a year and seeing God work miracle after miracle in the lives of hundreds of people. Our influence was spreading around the nation and we really felt that we had arrived.

Then all hell broke loose on us...

## 15: Lessons In Spiritual Warfare -

***“I pray that when I die, all of hell will rejoice that I am no longer in the fight.” - C.T. Studd***

I had always heard about this thing called spiritual warfare and had faced stiff episodes of it from the very beginning but I didn't feel like I really understood it. Well, I was about to be schooled. I had experienced supernatural moves of God and had seen amazing things but I had never had the kingdom of darkness come at me as hard as it did this time. I might have had an associates degree in spiritual warfare before now but unbeknownst to me, I had just signed up for post graduate studies in the field. From the very beginning of this new church, I began to have concerns about one of the leaders I had allowed to found the church with me. Though a nationally known conference speaker, theologian, and author he didn't seem to have the heart of love for the people of God nor the fire for lost souls that burned within me.

In my arrogance and perennial optimism, I believed that I could influence him toward these things. What I didn't perceive nor could have understood was the straight up evil self aggrandizement that drove him and the depths he would go to promote himself and remove my family in order to facilitate his “leadership” of our church. My family and I were greatly loved and admired in this church and the greater Houston, Texas Christian community but he was a very charismatic personality on the outside and those who were not as close to him as I was couldn't see his intentions. He began to wound people in my flock and in my family to point of asking people to leave the church because he simply disliked them. When I finally realized I had no choice but to stand up to him, it was too late.

He, like Absalom in 2 Samuel 15, had won the hearts of the people so when he rose up with false accusations and salacious innuendo about me, the people blindly followed. In January 2008, without being allowed to defend ourselves at all or explain anything, our whole family was “excommunicated” from the church and told to leave and never speak to anyone in the church again. Certified letters were sent to each member of my family, even our 12 year old daughter, telling them that they were “excommunicated” but with no explanation as to why. He threatened our dearest and closest friends with “excommunication” if they ever spoke to us again. He slandered us to national leadership friends, and even talked the owner of a famous website into taking down 180 of my sermons I had posted there that were being listened to in over 100 countries. He continued to come after me personally and through others including men from the church that I had hired to help me build high rises. They were eventually able to get me and my sons fired. Though many thought we should fight back, I felt strongly led of the Lord to be magnanimous and allow God to be our defender as He saw fit.

*Romans 12:19 Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, “I will take revenge; I will pay them back,”*

We were devastated to say the least. We decided to just have church at home with just our family on our couch and be done with the institutional church for awhile but the next Sunday 12 families showed up at our front door and said, “Can we sit in?” And so began another church in our living room. But the damage done to our souls and our family has left scars to this day. Our only consolation was that since we were obviously on Satan's hit-list we must be doing something right.

Eventually that self-important church leader hurt and/or “excommunicated” everyone in that church that we knew and loved and many were able to find solace in our encouragement. His bad fruit followed him and he eventually left the country.

Once again we were working as hard for God as we knew how.

There are too many crazy God-stories and fierce spiritual battles to tell all of it here but suffice it to say we were exporting the blessing in every way we thought possible and swinging our swords at the agents of darkness with all of our might. We were praying and preaching and working but a cloud of pain and darkness hovered over us. Some days it was hard to get out of bed. We still had people at our dinner table 3 and 4 nights a week and I was preaching every week, but it was hard.

We were living as radical for God as we could possibly imagine.

BUT GOD!... was about to completely blow our minds...



## 16: An Orphan On Our Doorstep -

***“Get as close as possible to those who are burning for God, and you will be ignited.” – Duke Taber***

We were serving God with everything we had or so we thought. Then two events transpired leading to two prayers that would change our lives forever. The first thing that happened was I was listening to the audio version of John Piper’s book, *Desiring God*, on my way home one day and this paragraph in chapter nine shook me to my very core...

*BECOMING WORLD CHRISTIANS “–I would like to believe that many of you who read this chapter are on the brink of setting a new course of commitment to missions: some a new commitment to go to a frontier people, others a new path of education, others a new use of your vocation in a culture less saturated by the church, others a new lifestyle and a new pattern of giving and praying and reading. I want to push you over the brink. I would like to make the cause of missions so attractive that you will no longer be able to resist its magnetism. Not that I believe everyone will become a missionary, or even should become one. But I pray that every reader of this book might become what David Bryant calls a “World Christian”—that you would reorder your life around God’s global cause.” – John Piper*

The moment I heard those words it flashed across my mind that though I had spent two and a half decades passionately pursuing Jesus and a decade and a half training my family to be warriors for Christ, I had totally missed God’s heartbeat for the nations. All of my focus and energy had been on America, my own country. I thought for a moment that my heart would burst. Hot tears flowed from my eyes and I nearly ran off the road. I began right then to cry out to God to send my family to the nations. Before I got home I had decided I needed to leave my church, sell everything, move into a little apartment, and spend the rest of my life pursuing Jesus on His mission among the nations. Now I just had to convince my wife and children. Shortly after this I heard another quote from John Piper which wrecked me further.

*“How then do you serve God? You posture yourself, and you maneuver your life, and you devote energy and effort and time and creativity to positioning yourself under the waterfall of God’s continual blessing, you find out where the waterfall of God’s blessing is falling and you get under it. When it moves, you follow it so that you stay wet. And usually it takes you overseas...” – John Piper*

This new vision of chasing God’s joy by strategically staying under a globe-trotting waterfall of heavenly quests blew my mind and elicited the first of the two life-changing prayers. I began to pray night and day for God to let me and my family in on the adventure by sending us to the nations.

The second event was shortly after reading *Desiring God*. February 21-24, 2008, I was speaking at a men’s Tres Dias retreat and a dear friend, whom I had met on my original Tres Dias weekend, Allen, was also speaking. During Allen’s message on Christian Action, he told the story of how he and his wife Cindy were called to orphan ministry and had adopted two sons from Kazakhstan and recently two daughters from Colombia. As he spoke my heart began to burn once again like it would burst and hot tears rolled down my face. Soon I was weeping uncontrollably. I recognized this feeling as an extraordinary moving of the Holy Spirit in my heart. I had felt it before with life-changing results. I literally felt as if I would die if I couldn’t get involved in orphan ministry. I started to debate with God by giving Him my resume, “I’m a

busy pastor, father of five teenagers, author, conference speaker, and I am fighting an incurable disease. What business, Lord, do I have getting involved in orphan ministry? I don't have time. I don't have money. Surely this is my imagination and not You Lord." He was not impressed. Suddenly, I had an idea. A safe prayer that I thought would get me off the hook. I prayed, "Lord, you know my heart. You know that I am willing but I don't know where to start. If You will drop an orphan on my doorstep, I will take it in." I gave Allen a big hug after his message and told him how moved I was and asked him to pray for us as we sought how the Lord would have us be involved in missions and especially orphan ministry. I came home and told my wife, Lisa, about my "safe" prayer. She responded, "Great!" "IF GOD DROPS AN ORPHAN ON OUR DOORSTEP... we will take it in."

Be careful what you pray for... God takes you seriously.

Two weeks later we received an email asking us to help a 13-year-old girl from Liberia, Africa named Mercy. She weighed 48 lbs., was dying, and needed a life-saving surgery.

Three years before when she was 10-years-old Mercy had accidentally ingested lye, a colorless, odorless chemical also called caustic soda which is used to process rubber from the rubber trees on the plantation where Mercy grew up. Her esophagus was destroyed and she had lain in a hospital and eventually an orphanage for 3 years.



Lisa, Rebekah, Beverly, Brooke, and I sat in the hospital waiting room and prayed during the surgery. While we were praying the lady that sent us the email and had brought Mercy to Houston's Texas Children's Hospital from Liberia began to weep profusely. We comforted her and said, "Don't worry, Mercy will be ok. The doctors say the prognosis is good!" She looked up at us and said, "I know. It's just that I don't know what to do with her now. I only had faith to get her here." Then she pointed to Lisa and me and said, "I think God wants you to adopt her." Long story short, on July 3, 2008 they literally dropped her on our doorstep and she became our daughter.

Before sending our family to the nations, God had sent the nations to us.

God had spoken to our family with a megaphone. He wanted us to have a heart for missions and especially the vulnerable children of the world. We took her in, loved her, ministered to her, and eventually legally adopted her.

We had no idea the incredible spiritual battle that would erupt the moment she walked through our door. It nearly took us out. It certainly drove us to our knees. It was beautiful, miraculous, and excruciatingly painful all at the same time but it was exactly what we needed to advance from regular

army to special forces in the kingdom of God. We learned that to adopt you must be willing to lay down your life for another.

Today Mercy is a beautiful, healthy, and happy girl. Adopting Mercy has been an incredible trial of faith and at the same time the single greatest miracle of love and transformation that we have ever personally witnessed and experienced.

After God dropped Mercy on our doorstep, we were feeling pretty satisfied that we had discovered the reason for the burning in our hearts for missions that had begun a few years before. I had prayed my "safe" prayer and God had answered immediately and miraculously.

Furthermore, He had healed Mercy physically and was in the process of healing her spiritually and emotionally. Surely this was God's complete plan for us being involved in orphan ministry and discipling the nations... or maybe He was about to go beyond what we could imagine or think...

Having Mercy in our home, hearing her stories, seeing her tears and her many struggles broke our hearts for the vulnerable children of the world and readied us for the next calling of God on our family.





## 17: The Condition For A Great Miracle -

***“Take care of giving up your first zeal; beware of cooling in the least degree. Ye were hot and earnest once; be hot and earnest still, and let the fire which once burnt within you still animate you.”***  
**– Charles H. Spurgeon**

It quickly became obvious to us that the forces of darkness were not happy about God sending us a new daughter. My sons and I worked building high-rise buildings while we were planting churches and three weeks after Mercy came through our door all three of us were lost our jobs on the same day. I lost a six figure income that day and was consequently out of work for almost a year. Financially, we have never recovered. But losing our jobs was not to be the height of the spiritual warfare for that day. We came home, gave the bad news to the girls and mom, and decided to go to dinner and forget our fears and worries. On the way home from dinner an old man who was off his medication tried to run my wife off the road in our little, safe, gated community where we lived. She pulled over and the boys and I got out to see what was going on and he accelerated to about 30 miles an hour, just missed me and hit our oldest son Luke sending him smashing head first into the man's windshield and then flying over the car and landing on the pavement as the man sped away. Immediately, Lisa took off and caught up to the man and blocked his car with hers and brought him to a stop. My heart sank to my feet as I watched all of this just a few feet away. But God! Even though the man's bumper, fender, mirror and windshield were dented and shattered, Luke jumped up off the ground and we discovered he had no broken bones or internal injuries and only a small scratch on his head. The EMTs who arrived shortly after and saw the damage to the car could not believe that Luke had even survived much less was unharmed. That day we knew we were in a war.

Soon after on a Tres Dias weekend we met a girl named Misti. She was 24 and was praying for a godly husband. Hmmm, we had a 24-year-old son who was a godly man! He was working in Dallas at the time but we wanted him to meet her at an upcoming Saturday pot-luck so Lisa called him and said, “Luke, you have to come home this weekend and go with us to a meeting.” He began to explain how busy he was and she simply said, “Obey your mother and come home this weekend.” He promptly called me and said, “Dad what in the world is going on this weekend. Mom was adamant.” I simply said, “Obey your mother and come home this weekend. There's a girl you need to meet.” He came home and we went to the meeting. I looked around and saw Misti talking to a friend at the coffee pot. I said, “Luke, let's get some coffee.” He said, “No thanks, I'm fine.” I said, “Luke, come on and get some coffee.” He said, “Dad, really I'm good.” I said, “Luke, COME WITH ME TO THE COFFEE POT!” He gave me a quizzical look and got up and we walked to the coffee pot



where I proceeded to introduce him to Misti. That was it. They married 6 months later. Luke serves with our ministry and Misti has been very involved in women's ministry now for 10 years.

Over the next several months our entire family's lives were wrapped up in ministering to Mercy and the spiritual warfare continued on every front. We couldn't believe the persecution we began to receive from people, even our own extended family, who didn't think it was right that we had adopted a black girl. We were stunned. Surely no one who named the name of Christ and knew the Bible could feel that way. Families left our church over it even. Friends whom we counted among our dearest quit speaking to us. Mercy deep down was very angry. She was all alone in another country, didn't understand the language, didn't understand these crazy white people and their rules, and we quickly realized just how far out of our depth we were to help this precious girl. It was very difficult for Mercy and our whole family but continually God showed up in stunning ways to show us that He was the author of this and we were on His mission.

Many days I held Mercy in my arms while she wet the front of my shirt weeping out her anger and pain and confusion. Like the Grinch in the animated Christmas special, I felt like my heart was growing ten times its normal size. Many nights my girls sat up with her and worked with her. Day after day Lisa worked trying to help her learn English, get caught up in school (she had missed several years of school due to her injury) and adjust to her new culture. All the while we were still writing, speaking, pastoring, and doing odd jobs trying to keep afloat financially. We made more mistakes than we care to remember but God was expanding our hearts and minds at a blinding pace and we were learning to see, feel, and act like Jesus to the least of these.

When Mercy was dropped on our doorstep we simply took her in. At the time we didn't even consider what to do legally not to mention with preaching and pastoring and speaking, we simply had no time to even think about it. But after a year my daughter Beverly, who had just graduated high school at 16 came to me and said, "Dad, put me to work in the ministry. Give me something to do." I asked her to hire a lawyer, hire a social worker, do the research, and figure out what it would take to adopt Mercy legally. And she did just that. Once in awhile she would show up with some papers for Lisa and I to sign or she



would tell us we all needed to go to the doctor on such and such a day to get physicals for the adoption. Finally the date was set for our home study and the lawyer and the social worker called me, I had not yet spoken to them, and said, "Mister Bullen, we were getting worried that we hadn't heard from you or your wife in all this time and the only person we have dealt with is your 16-year-old daughter. But we looked you up online and read some of your writings and realized that you are training Beverly to be a leader and a world impactor and not just being irresponsible with your adoption and we want you to know we think its awesome." Whew! I hadn't even considered how it might appear! Finally the day arrived and we went to court and signed all of the papers and Mercy was now a real Bullen. Oh happy day.

Within a year of Mercy's arrival we had experienced a total financial collapse and were on our way to losing everything. The financial meltdown of 2008 – 2009 was in full swing and we were hanging by a thread.

But God was working in us in ways we hadn't previously known was possible and our faith and our determination were growing leaps and bounds. We began to experience, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face and the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace - Helen Howarth Lennel" in a whole new way.

About this time a Tres Dias brother emailed me to say that he was going on a trip to Colombia, South America with Allen, the guy who broke my heart for orphan ministry the year before. They felt strongly that God wanted me to go with them. I told him that we were literally weeks away from being homeless and had our hands full with pastoring and Mercy and there was just no way I could go visit orphanages in Colombia with him.

Four more times over the next several weeks he reached out to me insisting that "he knew" this was from God and that I was supposed to be on this trip. Time after time I told him no.

Three weeks before the trip was supposed to leave I finally found a job back in construction with some dear Christian friends that was going to put us back on top financially. "Yes!" I thought, "God has answered our prayers. Good thing I didn't take him up on that crazy idea to go visit orphans in Colombia."

I called him on the phone and told him that I had just been hired at this company and there was absolutely no way I could go to Colombia. I'll never forget his response. "Well, ok brother, but I just know you are supposed to be there. Don't be mad at me but I'm going to keep praying that you will go." "Fair enough," I replied, and that was it. The next morning I walked in to my new job and my friend/new boss's face was white as a sheet. "Matt, I'm so sorry but the contract we hired you for was canceled this morning and we can't use you now." I assured him that it was ok and walked out the door but as I stepped across the threshold leaving that place of business I was reaching for my phone, hands shaking. "Hello? This is Matt. I think I'm supposed to be on that trip to Colombia with you. I don't know where I will get the money but count me in."

I went home and told my family what had happened expecting them to be upset, especially my wife, but quite the opposite was true.

They had just been watching a movie called Faith Like Potatoes and they insisted I sit down and watch it. I didn't feel like it but agreed. The story in that movie touched me to the very deepest catacombs of my soul. To this day I can't watch it without crying. At one point in the movie, which is a true story, the lead character, Angus Buchan, says, "The condition for a miracle is difficulty. The condition for a great miracle is impossibility."

That exploded in my heart because I was sitting in an absolutely impossible situation and yet I knew we were on the edge of something crazy amazing and I felt the Holy Spirit's peace waft over me and then my wife said, "You know, Beverly will turn 18 while you are on the trip to Colombia." "Oh!" I said, "Then I shouldn't go?" "No," Lisa said, "What I meant was you should take her with you. What better way to spend her 18th birthday than loving on orphans in Colombia with her dad?" "But we don't even have the money

for me to go”, I replied. “Well if God can send one, He can send two,” she said. And then she finished with, “The condition for a great miracle is impossibility!”

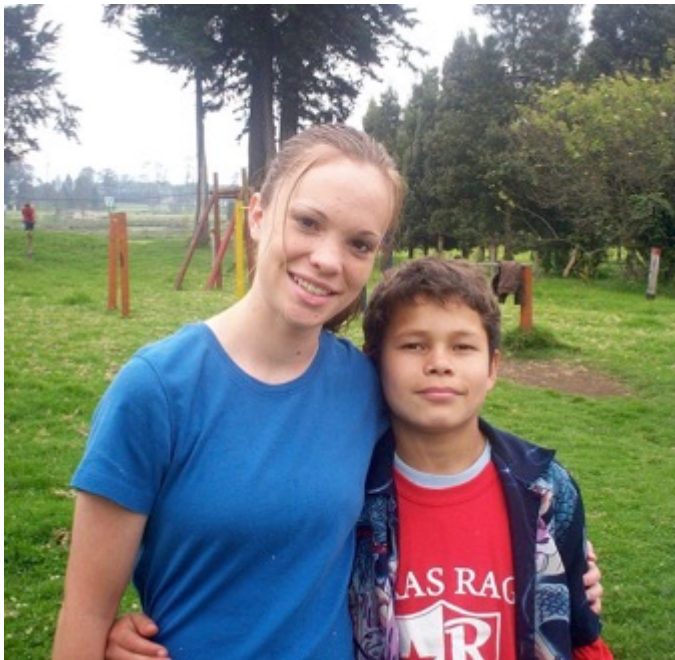
Three days later a man in our church called me and said, “Pack your bags, Pastor Matt. Some of us men are pitching in to pay your way. You and Beverly are going to Colombia.” And we did...



## 18: Gasoline On A Bonfire -

*“Oh that I could do more for Him, oh that I was a flame of pure and holy fire and had a thousand lives to spend in the dear Redeemer’s service.” – George Whitefield*

I was so busy trying to survive and shepherd my flock and family that it wasn’t until the night before we were supposed to leave for Bogota, Colombia that I sat down and looked it up on a map to see where in the world it was located. I had never been outside of the U.S. except childhood visits to Juarez, Mexico and on a cruise ship in the Caribbean. Beverly, who would turn 18 on the trip had never even flown on a plane before. We had no idea what lay in store, only a vague lingering sense of God’s hand in all of it. We landed in Bogota, Colombia the evening of June 19, 2009, went to the hotel, and as we got out of the van my dear friend Allen turned to me and said with tears in his eyes, “You are going to love this Matt. This is like Tres Dias on steroids.” And he was not wrong. In truth, it was like pouring gasoline on a bonfire.



We were mesmerized by all of the sights and sounds as we drove to the first orphanage the first day. Bevy and I were quite nervous as we walked into the orphanage but suddenly 80 smiling little boys surrounded us and took us by the hands to show us their home, a giant, dilapidated monastery on a hill surrounded by stunning views of mountains and farmland. There is no way we could have known that the little 10-year-old boy who first took Beverly’s hand within seconds of our first visit to an orphanage on our first ever mission trip would forever change our lives. He literally never let go of Beverly’s hand the whole two and a half days we were there and it nearly killed her to leave him the last day. She later would say that the supernatural love that she felt in her heart for this little boy made her understand for the first time in her life God’s love for us and she dates her true conversion to Christ from this experience.

She was a changed girl from that moment on. An inferno had been ignited in her teenage soul. That little boy’s name is Juan David and today he is our son. But I’m getting ahead of myself again...

Each day of the trip and each day of the subsequent 27 trips we have made to Colombia... but I’m getting ahead of myself again... I have written an email journal home and eventually blogs detailing each day’s events and miracles and below are my journal entries from that first trip.

Day 1 June 20, 2009

We had a wonderful day today! We went out in the country to the boys orphanage “Amparo De Ninos” (Protection of the Boys). We spent the day loving on 80 orphan boys between the ages of 10 & 18. Everyone of these boys is eligible for adoption and is just waiting for a family to come and take them home. First, we were given the grand tour of “their house” a beautiful and very old Catholic monastery now an orphanage. They showed us their bakery and insisted that we try some of their pastries which were delicious. They showed us their laundry room and nurses station and kitchen and their rooms. It was so precious to be surrounded by 10 or 15 boys at once trying to hug you, hold your hand, and talk to you in rapid fire Spanish. I was glad I knew how to say “hable mas despacio por favor” which means “please speak more slowly” :-). After the tour we sat around in a huge circle and introduced ourselves. Then I gave a message from Ephesians 2:1-10 through a translator and told them how all of us are boys who have ran away from God and been lost “But God” rich in mercy and full of great love provided a way back to Him through the death of Christ on the cross and now He calls us to faith in His son so that we may have a Father (God), a Brother (Jesus), and a family (Christians), and never be alone again. Some boys cried and others smiled and nodded and some fell asleep :-). After lunch we split the boys up into 4 teams and gave all the boys on each team a T-shirt. One team was red, one was blue, one was white, and one was gray. Two teams played soccer while two teams played kick ball (which was new to them) all with sports equipment we had brought to give to the orphanage. They had a marvelous time. When it came time for us to go, they begged us to stay and held onto the van until we drove out of the gates, all the while telling them “Hasta Manana!” (See you tomorrow). One little boy clung to Beverly all day and was really sweet. It was hard for her to leave him. My little friend that held my hand all day was so cute. Tomorrow we will go back there with 200 hot dogs, buns, catsup, mustard, mayonnaise, cokes, and candy and have a feast with them and another man from our group will give a devotion and then we will teach them some new games. Thanks for helping us to get here and for all of the prayers, Pastor Matt

Day 2 June 21, 2009

First thing this morning the team had a 2-hour conference with a man who with his wife founded a ministry to orphans here in Bogota called “Alma De Ninos” (Soul of the Children). They founded this ministry right after college and now have 263 orphans ages 10-18 (all eligible for adoption) in 5 different homes that they house and educate. We were very impressed with their work. Tomorrow we will go back to “Amparo De Ninos” (Protection of the Boys) for 1/2 day and then go to one of these “Alma De Ninos” homes that has 160 girls for the remainder of the day. After our meeting this morning we went back to “Amparo De Ninos” again and spent the whole day with the 80 boys there. The first thing we saw when we pulled through the gates this morning was all of the boys in their shirts we gave them playing soccer with the new equipment. It was wonderful to see their smiling faces again. We had a big hot dog cook out with chips and sodas and cookies. The boys never get “seconds” at meals so when we called



out that there was seconds for everyone they stamped. After lunch we played frisbee, dodgeball, and football. Later in the day we went into the old Catholic chapel and had a devotional from one of our team who is in seminary and works for a ministry in Waco. He told the boys that we love them and want to help them but there is only so much that we can do but Jesus has already borne all of their pain, suffering,

and sin on the cross and through faith in His sacrifice they can be healed. We then gave each boy a New Testament in Spanish. I was able to have some deep spiritual conversations with a couple of the boys and pray with them about their fears and struggles. We had many fun conversations as well and Beverly and I both learned a ton of Spanish. Beverly is making a list of all the little boys she wants to bring home, boys with names like Anderes Philip, Juan David, Alexander, Diego, and Ramido. I keep reminding her that we still have two girls orphanages to visit yet this week :-). Once again, thank you for making this possible and for all of the prayers, Pastor Matt

Day 3 June 22, 2009 was a marvelous day of blessings and much emotion. Today was Beverly's 18th birthday and I'm sure one that she will remember forever. At breakfast the whole team stood around her table and sang happy birthday and then presented her with a pretty tote bag with her name embroidered on the side. After breakfast we went back to "Amparo De Ninos" for the last time this trip. When we arrived there were no boys to be seen. As we walked into the orphanage they were lined up in the hall and as Beverly entered they sang happy birthday in broken english and clapped and wished her "Feliz Cupleano" (happy birthday). It was beautiful. We took a tour

of the grounds this time and were able to see their farming and dairy operation which helps with their needs and they also sell the milk to help with their costs. After some more soccer, we met in the chapel for a final devotion and to say our goodbyes. The young people on our team (Beverly (18), Sarah (18), brothers Matthew (20) and John (17), and Eric (24)) got up and gave testimony to what Christ is doing in their lives and why they came and what a blessing it has been and how they love and will miss the boys. Then I was able to share from John 14 about eternity and how short this troubled life is in comparison. I shared with them that though we may be separated in this life, if we believe in Jesus and turn from our sin, our own way, and cry out to Him,



resting solely on His mercy and grace for our salvation, then we will be together in eternity with our Lord. I told them about repentance and faith. After the devotion, 25 boys acknowledged their need for Christ and I was able to pray with them. Then 3 of the older boys got up and thanked us in the most precious manner you can imagine. They thanked us for the love of Jesus that they had seen in our faces and in our actions. They said that though the time we were able to spend with them probably seemed short to us it was like a lifetime to them because it is so rare that they get to experience anything like that. They said that few people in the world would come so far to spend their time with a bunch of orphans and they loved us for it and would remember it the rest of their life. Our sweet interpreter broke down several times and had a hard time translating all that they had to say to us. There was no shortage of tears among us all. We left at lunch with many tears and hugs and sweet goodbyes and promises to come back next year. One little boy, Juan David, who had stayed right with Beverly and I all week asked if I could be his "Padrino" (Godfather) and if Beverly could be his "Madrina" (Godmother). That was hard. We are bringing back information on each boy and have promised them that we will work to help connect them with families who wish to adopt. In the afternoon we went to a new orphanage called "Ciudad De La Nina" (City of the Girl) where there are 160 girls between the ages of 7 and 18. This is one of the orphanages of the man that we met with yesterday morning from "Alma De Ninos" (Soul of the Child). They had an assembly and the girls all sang to us and chanted out a welcome. We introduced ourselves and I just

happened to mention to them that it was Beverly's "Cupleano Hoy" (Birthday today) :-). So 160 girls sang happy birthday in Spanish, and beat on the tables, and clapped and Beverly blushed intensely and then proceeded to walk over and give me a well deserved punch in the kidney :-). We handed out a stuffed toy to each girl and told them that we would be back tomorrow to have an American cook out and spend the whole day with them. More chanting, clapping, and beating on the tables ensued. Many of the girls came up to thank us and give us each a big "abrazo" (hug). Five beautiful little girls surrounded me and asked if I had any daughters. I told them that I had 4 daughters including Beverly and then they asked me if I would like some more daughters because each of them are waiting for a family to adopt them. That was hard. We left there and went to dinner at the home of the lady who works from this end to help our team to work in these orphanages and acts as the guide on the trips. We had a wonderful Colombian dinner and rich Colombian coffee and then she pulled out a beautifully decorated chocolate cake and we all sang happy birthday to Beverly one more time. As she blew out the candle, Beverly wished out loud that we will be able to help some of these children, perhaps through adoption ourselves, in the future. We sang some worship songs and went back to our hotel asking God for strength and courage to once again be the hands and feet and arms of Jesus to the 160 girls at "Ciudad De La Nina" tomorrow. Once again, from the bottom of my heart, I thank you for supporting us in this work and for the many prayers. Many Blessings, Pastor Matt

That night when we got back to the hotel we tried to Skype with the family back home so they could sing happy birthday to Bevy but all she and I could do was cry and blubber about what we had seen and felt. Our family on the other side of the computer screen couldn't figure out what was going on with us... but soon they would... but I'm getting ahead of myself again.

Day 4 June 23, 2009

Today was another amazing day. We went back to "Ciudad De La Nina" (City of the Girl) to spend the whole day. This is the orphanage with 160 of the cutest girls ever seen that we visited briefly yesterday. We spent the morning talking with the girls (by now our Spanish is getting pretty good) and laughing and teasing while they asked us zillions of questions which we later realized were all directed at whether we would make good adoptive parents or not. They asked us important questions like how many shoes we owned and how much land and how many animals we owned and stuff like that :-). We then had a grand cook-out and fed them hot dogs and chips and ice cream with all of the toppings which took hours, literally. They thanked us dozens of times. It was a very happy, happy time. We then moved into the cafeteria and a group of the girls dressed in traditional Colombian dress did several dances for us. It was really beautiful. Next, it was time for the devotion. I shared with them about my family and how that all of my adult life my passion has been to be a good father. I told them how I love my children and how I desire to give good things to them and how I would even die for them. But then I shared with them that the Bible says that if earthly fathers who are sinners give good gifts to their children how much more does the Heavenly Father. I then proceeded to share with them the wonderful news of a Heavenly Father who loves them and who sent His Son to die for them and how that by faith they can have this Father for their own and He will never leave them, He will never let them down. We then gave out a pair of brand new tennis shoes to each girl and a New Testament in Spanish. Then it was time for us to go. However, some of the girls got the idea of having each of us sign their Bible for them. So we spent the next 30 minutes with crowds of girls around each of us signing Bibles as fast as we could write our names. It was unspeakably precious. We had to tell them goodbye for this trip and words cannot express the feeling in our hearts as we left those girls, many with tears, promising to do what we can to help them in the days ahead and asking God to watch over them. It was especially hard for me to leave 3 little girls named Jaime, Brenda, and Wendy who had held my hands all day and called me Papa. Tomorrow we go to "Amparo De Ninas" (Protection of the Girls) here in the city which is one of the main reasons for the trip



and we will spend the rest of our week there. I can only imagine how hard it will be to leave our new little friends there after we spend the next three days with them but I'll cross that bridge when I get to it. I have a new appreciation for my Savior who once said, "suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not for of such is the kingdom of heaven." Love and Prayers, Pastor Matt

Little did I know that the next day, June 24, 2009 would change my life forever. This is the day that Beverly and I met my Colombian daughters, Heidy & Ginary, and I fell ridiculously, insanely, supernaturally, head over heels in love.

Day 5 June 24, 2009

Today was another example of God's hand mightily at work among us. We arrived at "Amparo De Ninas" at about 10:00am. There are 76 girls in this orphanage. They were all ready to go to the big city park "just down the road" so we set out walking to the park. An hour and 5 or 6 miles later we arrived at the park. It was a lovely walk in the 70 degree weather with each of us surrounded by girls holding our hands or walking arm in arm and asking question after question. It was wonderful. The park is a gigantic, beautiful, lush, park with two lakes. If walking "to" the park wasn't enough we also had to walk all around the park and see all of the sites which gave us lots of opportunity to talk about the Lord, America, food, music, and so on. The nuns cooked in huge kettles over an open fire right in the park a wonderful "soup" full of beef ribs, chicken leg quarters, bananas, plantain, potatoes, rice and so on. It was delicious and hearty. We played volleyball, soccer, earth ball, ladder ball and shot marshmallow guns at each other. At about 3:00pm the rain came and we had to head back to the orphanage. By the time we got back the rain had stopped so we dragged chairs out into the courtyard and sat around and visited until time to go. My heart was pierced again and again as were the rest of the team as we got to know these beautiful girls and see their personalities and know that if they don't get adopted the statistics tell us that most of them will be dead within two years of leaving the orphanage. One little girl in particular, named Heidy, followed Beverly around all day and tried really hard to communicate with her. At one point she began to play piano scales with her fingers on Beverly's arm and suddenly they realized that they knew a universal language, music. This little girl plays the piano, flute, and drums. I had seen her with Beverly all day but I was monopolized by several other sweet girls and didn't get to meet her until we were almost ready to leave. Someone said that she could sing and so we coerced her into singing for us. When she started to sing I thought that heaven had opened up and an angel was singing to us. We were stunned. As I write this there are chills going down my spine and tears filling my eyes. I know that God has a plan for this girl and I am so grateful that on this day I was able to love on her and make her laugh several times and let her know that she has friends from Texas. Tomorrow we go back to have a big hot dog cookout with these girls and then Friday we will be with them all day as well. I can't wait to get back there and see all of my little friends. I don't know what the future holds but I know, God willing, that we are going to have a wonderful time in the Lord while we can. Love and Prayers, Pastor Matt

Day 6 June 25, 2009 Today was a happy day! We rested some and saw some sites this morning and then went back to "Amparo De Ninas" this afternoon. It was such a happy day because we had made friends with these girls yesterday and they know that we aren't leaving until Saturday so they don't have to be sad yet and so we were able to just be comfortable with each other and really loosen up and have some fun. When I walked into the courtyard I saw that the girls had taken colored chalk and in huge fancy letters written on the asphalt "Mateo, Te Queremos Mucho" (Matthew, We Love You Very Much). The little girl, Heidy, that I told about who was such a singer and musician had drawn a large picture of a girl with a smaller girl with her head on her shoulder and under the larger girl was the name Beverly and under the smaller girl was her name with hearts all around the picture. It was beautiful. We played basketball, volleyball, and sat around and talked a lot. For dinner we had our big hot dog cook out and

then made popcorn and roasted marshmallows over the charcoal. Someone brought out a stereo and then it got crazy. In case you ever wondered if Latin girls can dance, I am here to tell you positively that they can and that they are determined when trying to teach us "Americanos" how to as well. I've never had more fun in my life. We laughed and we made them laugh. We danced and took crazy pictures of each other until our camera batteries were gone. We talked and played until the sun was way down and it was time to go. Some of the girls made woven bracelets and Beverly knew how to start them so there was literally a line of girls waiting for Beverly to help them get theirs started. Heidy brought her bracelet when completed and put it on my arm. I tried to give it back and tell her it was for her but she would have none of it. All day yesterday and today I kept trying to get her picture but she wouldn't let me or anyone else. Apparently she is infamous for hating to have her picture taken. Once when I surprised her with a shot she begged me to delete it and so I did. She did allow a picture of her and Beverly with her drawing though and right before we left she came up and said "Una photo de tu y yo" (One photo of you and me) so I was able to get her picture after all. My friend, Allen, took the shot and I can't wait to get it from him. I knew that it was a huge gesture of friendship for her to permit it and I will cherish that picture. It reminded me of summer camp when I was a boy and making new friends and having fun and giving yourself to the moment knowing that the week will end but for the moment this is all there is in the universe. I know God put Beverly and I on this wonderful team of people and appointed us for this trip and I can gratefully say that I have soaked up every minute. I came here to show the love of Jesus to these children but what I didn't expect was to see His love for me through them. Love and Prayers, Pastor Matt

Day 7 June 26, 2009 Our final day here in Bogota was very sweet and very sad as was expected. We went back to "Amparo De Ninas" today. The girls were all gathered and Beverly, David, Sarah, and I sang "Here I Am To Worship" for them and then I gave our last devotional from Romans 15:13 Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. I shared with them how the God of hope loves them and has a plan for them. And when they believe the Holy Spirit comes and fills them with hope, joy, and peace. They can search for those things in the world, in things, in human relationships, but they are only to be found in God through His Son Jesus Christ. Several girls prayed with me after acknowledging their need for and total dependence on Jesus Christ for their eternal salvation. After the devotion, the team gave each girl a New Testament in Spanish and a brand new pair of shoes and a stuffed bunny. I should mention here that our team bought 361 pairs of shoes this week for girls and boys in every orphanage we visited plus 4 other orphanages that we were not able to visit this time. Then it was lunch time and we enjoyed eating and visiting together. Two girls wrote me sweet notes thanking me for opening my heart to them and for the love that they felt. I have so many little sisters now. Instead of trying to celebrate each girls birthday when it comes around they have two big parties a year, one in June for the January through June birthdays





and one at the end of the year for the rest. Today was the big birthday party for the first 1/2 of the year so after lunch our buddies from “Amparo De Ninos” that we visited earlier in the week showed up and the party began. There were cakes and we brought ice cream and toppings and there was a DJ and lots of dancing :-). The kids look forward to this for 6 months and they were extra delighted that we were going to be there to share it with them. It was a happy time. As the day began to come to a close the girls started bringing me their email addresses on scraps of paper and eliciting promises of staying in touch and promises to return and see them when we can. When it actually came time to leave, we gathered in a big circle and held hands and I prayed. I asked God

to watch over our friends, to draw them close to Himself, to let them know that we love them and it is because He first loved us, and to hold our hearts in His hand until we see each other again. After the prayer, some of the girls got up and thanked us. Heidi, the little girl that captured Beverly and my heart and with whom we had much fun today, got up and said, “Thank you for coming to show us love. Believe me, your riches in heaven will be great. You have given 365 days worth of love in 3 days. God bless you.” Then it was time to go and girls rushed to kiss us on the cheek and give us hugs. Many were crying as were we. They thanked us over and over again. Finally, before some of the team dragged me into the van and closed the door, I gave Heidi the last of many tearful hugs and we said our sweet goodbyes. I don’t have the words to say what we all felt as we drove away but there was much sobbing and many determined oaths to redouble our efforts to “Vindicate the weak and fatherless and do justice to the afflicted and destitute.” Psalm 82:3 Love and Prayers, Pastor Matt

As little Heidi and I were giving each other our last tearful goodbyes and hugs and kisses and she was whispering in my ear “I love you, I’ll be praying for you” my friends David and Allen grabbed me by the back of my leather jacket and literally dragged me into the van and slammed the door because we were going to miss our flight. As the door closed and we drove away from Amparo De Ninas, I sat frozen for a moment and then I turned to David and quietly said, “If I have to swim the gulf of Mexico, I’m going to help that little girl.” Then I fell into his arms and sobbed like a baby all the way to the airport.

Here is an excerpt from Beverly’s journal from that trip...

*“The summer I graduated high school I read, “Don’t waste your life” by John Piper. When I read that book God put a fervent desire in my heart to give my life wholly and completely over to Him to do with as He would. He stirred a passion in me to do something meaningful something that would impact the kingdom of God for His glory. That same summer God brought a young orphan girl into our life named Mercy. She needed a home and a loving forever family. I knew right away that God wanted me to make a ministry of this precious new sister. And so I spent that year pouring into her the love of God. And then one day my dad walks into the office and tells me about an opportunity he was given to go on a mission trip to Bogota, Colombia and I was reminded of what God had stirred in me the summer before. I had no idea what to expect and sometimes wondered what in the world were we getting ourselves into. The first day we visited a boy’s orphanage. It was very awkward and I did not know what to do with myself. And then one sweet shy little boy kept taking my hand every chance he got and started showing me around. He showed*

*me everything but when he took me to one of the rooms where they sleep and showed me his bed and his little backpack that held all the little toys he owned I wanted to cry. That first day he hardly ever left my side soaking in all the love and affection he could. But after that he began to pull away and I realized it was because he knew we were going to leave and wanted to make it as least painful as he could by staying away. It broke my heart. That night I couldn't stop thinking of all the little things in life I take for granted. Things like a hug or a shelf full of stuffed animals or a pantry full of food or just family. Over the next few days we visited two girls orphanages. I marveled at how selfless and loving these children were and at how even though we had gifts and food and things to give them what they wanted the most was our love. All they wanted was to hold your hand to make you laugh to hug you to see you smile. That baffled me the most. We were there to serve them and give them love and they were so eager to do just that for us. Telling these precious children goodbye on that last day was the hardest thing I have ever done. God stirred a passion in me when I read, "Don't waste your life" to do something of worth and value for the kingdom of God. And I have to say I am certain I have found that something. And that something is to take God's love and the gospel to Orphans and God willing bring some home to teach and train in the ways of the Lord." - Beverly Bullen*

Beverly and I sat quietly on the plane with copious tears flowing down both of our cheeks. Suddenly she reached over and squeezed my hand so hard it hurt. "Dad, promise me that we will never be the same again! Promise me! Promise me that we won't forget what we saw, what we felt, and we will go home and do something about it!" All I could choke out was, "Beverly, I promise, if we have to swim the Gulf of Mexico, we are going to help those kids."

## **19: Swimming The Gulf Of Mexico**

***“God’s ministers are to be a flame of fire—a perpetual flame, a constant fire, a continual burning, burning and shining lights. God has nothing less for us than to be flames. We must have a living faith in God, a faith that God’s great might and power may flame through us until our whole life is energized by the power of God.”***  
***- Smith Wigglesworth***

Beverly and I came home from Colombia absolutely wrecked by the Spirit of God. We tried to go back to our life of pastoring and working wherever God provided work but it was of no use. For three months I cried at least once every day. I would sit and look at photos of the children in Colombia and weep. My family started asking me, “Daddy, please don’t look at those photos anymore. We can’t stand to see you so broken up.” I remember one day walking through the grocery store and seeing a little brown skinned girl holding her daddy’s hand and I burst into tears. I stopped right there in the store and called my friend, Allen and asked, “Allen, when does the crying stop?” He replied, “Honestly, I don’t know, it’s been three years for me and I’m still crying.” I knew then I was in deep trouble.

I was so wrecked I could hardly function. My elders and the deacons of my church began to worry about me. I couldn’t eat. When I did sleep I would dream about those precious children so desperate for love. It was the most beautiful pain I had ever experienced. Beverly was in the same lovely agony. We were so glad we at least had each other to commiserate with. I began to realize that I was feeling the heartbeat of Jesus. This must be a tiny bit of what He feels for the world! I would try to preach what I thought my congregation needed from the word for their lives but every sermon ended up being about going to the nations. I was eaten up with it, hopelessly addicted, and the only place I could get a fix was a plane ride away on another continent. Also during this time our oldest daughter Rebekah, who was 20-years-old began to bug me every day about when she could go. She was eaten up with holy envy at the newfound passion and hunger that she saw in Beverly and me and she wanted in on it!

My partners in crime, David and Allen, and I began to formulate a scheme to go back. One day I realized that I hadn’t checked my frequent flier miles in a long time and to my great delight I found that I had enough for 2 plane tickets to Bogota! Though we literally had no money and no earthly business turning around and going back to Colombia just three months after that first trip, we went anyway. Like any addict, nothing else mattered now but getting back there and getting a fresh dose of that Holy Spirit gasoline on our bonfire. Rebekah kept saying, “Dad, I have to go or die” and I knew she wasn’t being dramatic. So Rebekah, David, Allen, and I landed in Bogota in September of 2009 with no plan, no money, nothing but a furious passion that could only have come from God. We only knew we were supposed to go no matter what and God showed up for us in ways we couldn’t have imagined.



The first morning we met with some government officials to begin the process of adopting our daughter Heidy. We had been warned that one particular official was very stern and very tough and that we probably wouldn't make any progress with her so we were praying like crazy when we walked into her office and sat down. Immediately she began to ask many gruff questions about our intentions and what we planned to do. Out of the corner of my eye I could see Rebekah praying like a mad woman under her breath. Suddenly, we felt a Presence enter the room. It was so obvious Rebekah later told me that she was tempted to reach out her hand and see if she could touch Him. As we continued to explain our hearts for these children, the government official softened and

even teared up and she told us that she was thrilled with our intentions and would help us in any way she could. She gave us permission to begin the adoption process and even more shocking she gave us permission to take Heidy and David and Allen's Goddaughters out of the orphanage for a little supervised vacation while we were there. We left that meeting walking on air. The word miracle was on everyone's lips. And this was all before noon on the first day!

Next, we went and visited a little boys orphanage that would later become one of our favorites and then we went on to Heidy's orphanage. As we drove through the gate my heart began to pound and tears welled up in my eyes. We stepped out of the van and were instantly surrounded by 80+ smiling, hugging, chattering girls. I was frantically scanning the crowd for my little Heidy. What happened next will be seared into my soul for all eternity. Suddenly, we heard a blood curdling scream and little Heidy came running across the yard, leaped over a hedge, and jumped into my arms. I'm 6'-1" tall and yet she jumped so high she almost went over my shoulder. I fell back against the van and held her as she continued to squeal and yelp with joy, hugging my neck and kissing me on the cheek. When I introduced her to Rebekah she squeezed her like she would break her in two all the while saying, "mi hermana, mi hermana". Also that day, Rebekah met a little girl named Hasbleydy Johanna. As often happens, they immediately fell in love with each other and before we left Hasbleydy asked Rebekah if she would adopt her and be her Mama. One look at Rebekah's face told me that she had been bitten by the same fatal Holy Spirit bug and she would never be the same again, hallelujah. Heidy stared in disbelief when we told her to go pack her things because she was going on a little family vacation with us.

The next morning, we had a fun breakfast with the girls and then we had an 8:30am appointment with the regional director for ICBF (Colombian Child Welfare) to talk about someday doing a summer camp in Texas where 20 or so adoptable orphans from Colombia could come to the Houston area for a week and stay in the homes of host families who were interested in adoption or just ministering to the children for that week. We did this two years later and 15 were adopted... but I'm getting ahead of myself again. For the next 5 days we had the most wonderful time imaginable. One of the highlights for me was buying Heidy her first ever milkshake. She was so enthralled. Also, Rebekah was able to meet Juan David when we spent the day at his orphanage as well. We left Heidy at her orphanage with a hug and a kiss and a Spanish Bible with her name embossed on the front and the promise that we would be back soon... even if we had to swim the Gulf of Mexico...

Here is a small excerpt from my journal the last night,

*Rebekah broke down pretty bad as we drove away. She, of course, wanted to bring the whole orphanage home with us. Well, if I don't get on the plane right now, I will have to stay in Colombia... Wait, why would that be a bad thing??? Oh yeah, they probably wouldn't let me live at the girl's orphanage anyway so I better go!*

As our plane left the runway, I looked over at Rebekah with tears running down her face and I knew that Beverly and I had a new addict on our team.

## **20: Recruiting Jesus Addicts -**

***“Fire is the chosen symbol of heaven for moral passion. It is emotion aflame. God is love. God is fire... It is by a holy passion kindled in the soul that we live the life of God.” – Samuel Chadwick***

Rebekah and I arrived back in Houston that Sunday and our feet were hardly touching the ground. We had spent five amazing days in the presence of Jesus and loving on His lambs and we were full up to the brim. Three days later, as the Lord would have it, I was to speak at a three day men’s retreat called Tres Dias. Ironically, this is the same ministry where I first heard my friend Allen talk about orphan ministry and God got ahold of my heart. I was so excited that I was going into this set of weekends, the men’s weekend followed by speaking at the women’s the very next weekend, so full of the Holy Spirit. I felt as if I was floating on a cloud as I arrived at the camp that Thursday. I was oozing joy and excitement and everyone around me could feel it. I was to speak twice that weekend, once on The Means of Grace, and once on The Life in Grace. What better subjects to talk about after just spending a week under the waterfall of Grace in Colombia. I preached my heart out both times and showed a video of the pictures from our trip with a song playing in the background by Steven Curtis Chapman called “What Now” The first line of the song says, “I saw the face of Jesus in a little orphan girl.” The presence of the Lord was powerfully with us and I knew lives were being changed. After I showed the video it was time for lunch. As I walked into the lunchroom a man walked up to me with tears in his eyes and said, “My name is Luis. I am from Bogota, Colombia. I speak both languages fluently. I know the city, the government, the culture. I have experienced the grace of God today, I know God spoke to me today, and I am at your service.” I couldn’t believe it and yet I could. I hugged him and said, “I have been praying for you for six months.” We began then to plan the next trip and we set out to pray about whom the Lord would have come with us. Luis did end up going on that trip and became a huge blessing to me over the years.

Another young man named Chris P. walked up to me on the weekend and when I gave him a hug, a jolt of electricity went through my body. I pulled away and said, “Chris, I think you are supposed to go to Colombia with me.” He said, “What?!” “Well, ok. Let me pray about that.” That moment changed his life forever.

We also immediately started working on adoption paperwork for Heidi and Ginary to become our daughters. During this time, someone mentioned to me, “Hey have you heard about National Orphan Sunday, November 8, 2009?” so I started checking into it and found that Christian Alliance for Orphans and Steven Curtis Chapman’s ministry and others had organized a national day to recognize the plight of the orphan and were encouraging churches across the country to have a special emphasis that day. We quickly began to plan and promote Orphan Sunday at Heritage Church where I was pastoring at the time. When the day came, the church was filled with people and there were dozens of former orphans from all over the world who had been adopted. Someone commented that it looked like a miniature United Nations that day. It was one of the best days of my life.

There were many other amazing providences that led up to this trip as well. One that especially sticks out in my mind was a prayer meeting that David, Allen, and myself had in my study. We had all been feeling the pressure and the spiritual warfare leading up to this trip and we agreed to meet at my place and get on our faces before God and seek His help and power. Before we began to pray, David mentioned



some men that the Lord had laid on his heart regarding orphan ministry. We wrote down three names and prayed for them and for God's leading. One of the men's names was Chris D., a brother that we had met at Tres Dias. It was a powerful prayer meeting and afterward we dried our eyes and hugged each other goodbye.

About twenty minutes later, my phone rang and it was David and his voice was shaking and he told me that just after he and Allen left my house, his phone rang and it was Chris D. calling to say that for "some reason" he and his wife couldn't quit thinking about Colombia and the orphans and that he wanted to get more information about going with us. Chris D. did go with us on the January trip and I'll never forget as long as I live the words he said as we were leaving the last orphanage on the last night headed to the airport. We were standing outside the gate of the orphanage on a dirt road in this inner-city slum and with tears rolling down his face Chris said, "The next time someone tells me they want to see Jesus I'm going to tell them, 'I can give you the street address where He lives'."

This time my daughter Brooke as well as Rebekah and Beverly made sure I knew they wanted to go. It was a total stretching of our faith because at this time I had been out of work for about 18 months and money was really tight. For just me to go in January would require a huge miracle. We set about to pray for people and pray for money and God answered big. My co-pastor and dear friend, Chuck, also expressed interest in going but he too had no idea where the money would come from.

I began to walk the streets of my neighborhood every night crying out to God to pay our bills and somehow get us all to Colombia in January. One morning my phone rang and a dear friend from a previous church I had pastored said, "I hear you want to take 5 or 6 people with you to Colombia and I want to pay for them!" Wow! So all of us including Chuck, Luis, Chris D., Chris P., and several others were going to Colombia!

We had a wonderful trip! On that trip Chris D. met a little girl in the orphanage named Laura. Eventually she became their daughter and on June 1, 2018 I had the heavenly pleasure of officiating at her wedding to a godly young man.

All the miracle stories I could tell only heaven remembers but one that sticks out in my mind happened on this trip. We were at the boys orphanage where our son Juan David lived and shockingly the director of the orphanage agreed to open the Catholic chapel, which they only opened for the priest to come 1 day a year. They opened it for us so we could have a service and share the gospel with 80 boys. I stood in the back allowing the team to share their testimonies but as I stood there this strong urge rose up within me to share Proverbs 14:12 "There is a way that seems right to a man but the end thereof are the ways of death." I argued with myself that I should not take over and that I should just let the team share but the urge grew stronger and stronger until I couldn't resist. I walked to the front and shared the verse and a few words about what it meant to me. The Holy Spirit swept across that room and boys started coming forward wanting to be saved. I looked back in the corner and the local college professor who was present that day to teach in the orphanage school was weeping profusely and asking for someone to show him how to be saved. We couldn't believe it! We led him to Christ and he asked for a Bible which we gave him. He hugged the Bible with tears running down his face and thanked us over and over again. We were stunned and grateful to God. Several boys gave their heart to Jesus that day. But the most jarring thing that happened to me personally was when I returned back to the hotel and opened my computer to find an email from a friend who had sent me a different verse of scripture every day for 8 years. I opened the email and the verse he sent me that day was Proverbs 14:12! God knows what He is doing and He knows how to get your attention.

Also on that June trip, within the first hour of the first day at the first orphanage 23-year-old Chris P. came up to me and said, "When are we coming back here?" I said, "Tomorrow." He said, "No, I mean when is the next mission trip to Colombia." I said, "Oh, in October." He said, "That will never work. I have to get back here sooner than that. I'm going to go home, sell all my stuff, quit my \$80,000 a year job, and come here full time." My mind was reeling! I'm thinking wait a minute Chris, we've only been here one hour on the first day! But Chris did in fact go home, quit his job, sell everything, and became our missionary to Colombia for two years. While he was there he met a little girl named Sophia. His parents eventually adopted Sophia and she is a lovely young lady. Later Chris P. and his new bride went to Zambia with Rebekah for a year and they are still in ministry today.

Things were going really well and miracles abounded but something happened just before we left for that trip that would prove to be a catalyst for the most difficult period of spiritual warfare we have ever experienced.

## **21: All Out Spiritual War -**

***“Love is perfected in the fire of God.” – Samuel Chadwick***

Totally unbeknownst to us, my worship leader of our church I pastored was currently and had been for years systematically sexually abusing his two teenage adopted daughters, one of which was our son's, who was away in the Navy, girlfriend. She eventually cried out to him and then to me, I discreetly confirmed everything, and then brought in law enforcement to investigate. Once he and his wife got wind of the fact that I knew the truth, the war was on! I convinced them to bring the 16-year-old daughter who had cried out to me to stay with our family and after dropping her off they fled the city.

They were very popular in the church and launched a campaign of lies to try and cover for this horrendous sin and they successfully convinced many of the church of his innocence and that she was a rebellious lying girl and that I was totally in the wrong. It was nightmarish! The battle was terrible! Our church disintegrated before our eyes. I was out of a job as a pastor by late spring of 2010 and our family went through a terrible time. Law enforcement pursued them and eventually after years of evading it the whole story came out finally and the other daughter was rescued.

But back to their daughter that they dropped on our doorstep... For the first three months she had such horrible night terrors that she would scream and try to throw herself out of windows and fight us and then pass out and then rise up to fight again. We took every mattress in our house and placed them on the living room floor in a circle around the mattress that the girl slept on and we all slept in the circle around her. Many nights we sat up all night reading the scripture or singing Agnus Dei around her. After 3 months she finally had a breakthrough and settled down to a happy life in our family for a time.

One morning as I sat in my truck on the jobsite waiting for subcontractors to arrive, I wrote this poem for her. She later put it to music and my daughters sang it in four-part harmony at many of our functions to my great delight.

### A Soul's Worth

Wandering through the world of men  
Absorbed with all that might have been  
Wealth is gained and empires lost  
Without considering the lives it cost  
We place the profit above the person  
Sacrifice all for fame and fortune

### Chorus

What would a man give in return  
One life to save, when will we learn  
A soul's worth can it be named?  
What is the price of one reclaimed?  
Can we afford to ignore the strife  
What would you give for a life?

A little girl with tear stained face  
Nothing can her shame erase  
To save her life would be to chance  
The loss of wealth and circumstance  
To risk the ire of stony hearts  
To feel the sting of many darts

Chorus

What would a man give in return  
One life to save, when will we learn  
A soul's worth can it be named?  
What is the price of one reclaimed?  
Can we afford to ignore the strife  
What would you give for a life?

Matt Bullen - 2010

After she turned 18 she married our son and they gave us 2 of the most beautiful granddaughters you can imagine. Sadly, her demons still plague her horribly and she left him to be a lesbian and now lives with another woman. Our granddaughters lived with us for a year at one point and we loved that time with them.

But back to the spring of 2010, right in the midst of the battle. My wife, Lisa, and I went to Colombia for her first trip in April, 2010 and we were blessed to spend a week with Heidi and Ginary. It was precious and magical and we made great progress on their adoptions. But the war was far from over. The week after we returned from Colombia, the turmoil in our home was so great that our African daughter, Mercy, couldn't take it and she ran away. She was gone for 1 year. Our world stopped turning. Due to her running away, the government canceled our adoptions in Colombia. We had our last church service the next Sunday and closed the church down that next week. It was a terrible time... The darkest time of our lives... We lost everything. We lost our adopted children, we lost our house, we lost all of our possessions, we lost our health, and worst of all, we lost most of our friends.

Here is an excerpt from my journal during that period -

*If I have learned anything in the last few years it has been that "there is no victory without a fight, there is no sunrise without a night, there is no purchase without a cost, and there is no crown without a cross." - The Martins. It was a surreal time in the Bullen family. One day in February, in the midst of all of this, I was down to my last \$20.00 without taking something to the pawnshop which I had already done several times that year. I put the \$20.00 in my gas tank and said, "ok Lord, I'm in your hands." That afternoon I was offered a job starting the next day. I was so excited and thankful. The next morning, I left to go to my new job and was in a car accident half-way there. It was kind of a freak accident where my car just started sliding and I couldn't stop it. I had to call my brand-new boss and tell him and then be towed to the mechanic. As I was sitting at the mechanic waiting to find out how bad the damage was I received a call that my oldest son Luke. He had also had a car accident that morning at the exact same time as me and his car had slid off the road and spun end for end into a field "barely" missing several trees and power poles and had landed in the only spot that it could have landed without destroying his car. Later that afternoon, I learned that my father had had a very similar car accident that same morning at the exact same time as Luke and my accident. All of us were unharmed and only my vehicle had any major damage.*

*Thankfully my Christian boss understood. These are only a few of the things that happened between my third and fourth trip to Colombia and all it did for me was solidify that I was in the right place, God was at work, and the devil was really mad about it. All, wonderful things to know. We survived February and March. The sun began to shine again and in April we went back to Bogota for a fourth trip.... Here are some quotes from Christians whom God used to change the world that really encouraged me during this time.*

*"A radical willingness to risk, sacrifice, and suffer is the attitude of authentic ministry." – John Piper*

*"Affliction is often that thing which prepares an ordinary person for some sort of an extraordinary destiny."  
– C.S. Lewis*

*"Pain and suffering have come into your life, but remember pain, sorrow, suffering are but the kiss of Jesus – a sign that you have come so close to Him that He can kiss you." – Mother Teresa*

*"God had one son on earth without sin but never one without suffering." – Augustine*

Here is another journal excerpt from that period -

*There is no Easter Sunday without a Good Friday. We arrived home on Monday, April 19, 2010 tired but full of joy and hope that our sweet Colombian girls were coming home soon. Our beloved African daughter, Mercy, ran away from home the next Thursday and was eventually placed by Child Protective Services in a group home. Court dates and much legal wrangling ensued and we ultimately had to let her go. The heart-breaking phone call came shortly thereafter from our adoption agency informing us that our adoption of Heidy and Ginary had been cancelled and that due to this incident with Mercy we would not ever be candidates for adoption again. We, of course, were devastated. We had spent thousands of dollars and hundreds of hours trying to save these two precious girls and Mercy but God is the keeper of the accounts and he knows! We are at His disposal and we receive from His hand good things and bad things with the same joy. The one resounding message that continued to ring through my heart as I received this dreadful news was, "My son, I don't want you to just help two or three girls, I want you to help them all." Through the pain and tears I bowed my heart before the Lord and replied, "Yes, Lord. I believe, help my unbelief."*

We knew we were in God's will and so we kept swinging our swords.

The only thing I knew to do was to keep following Jesus and so I made 4 more trips to Colombia taking dozens of people and God poured out His Spirit and many lives were changed. Another crazy miracle God did was to allow us to bring Heidy and Ginary and 6 other Colombian orphan girls to spend two weeks with Christian families over the holidays. It was a kiss on the cheek from heaven to get to spend Christmas 2010 with our two precious girls. As we sat around our dinner table Christmas day, I looked around at our family, our two Colombian girls, a member of the Colombian government, and my friend Anoop from India and once again, it felt like the United Nations. Our hearts were broken that Mercy's seat was empty but it was obvious God was on the move. The next summer we worked crazy hard, sacrificed, and even endured persecution to bring 17 Colombian orphans to Houston of which 15 were adopted into Christian families. Eventually we were super blessed to help over 35 orphans get adopted into Christian homes in the greater Houston, Texas area. Praise God! I preached everywhere and God blessed mightily. We worked many Tres Dias weekends and we saw many miracles.

But combine the stories from Lessons In Spiritual Warfare and All Out Spiritual War and I was just dead inside. Our family struggled terribly during this time. For two years I prayed that I could just go to heaven. I was tired of the war...



## 22: Jesus Is Worth The Fire -

***“The furnace of affliction is a good place for you, Christian; it benefits you; it helps you to become more like Christ, and it is fitting you for heaven.” — C.H. Spurgeon***

If I had figuratively received a Master’s Degree in spiritual warfare before, now, I was probably in the process of earning a doctorate. In the midst of this dark time I was driving one day to go preach and my then 21-year-old eldest daughter, Rebekah, was riding with me. She could see the devastation on my face. She turned to me and said, “Daddy, please don’t be so sad.” I said, “Sorry sweetie, I’m trying.” Then she said something so anointed by the Holy Spirit that it changed my life forever. She said, “Daddy, remember, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego didn’t see Jesus until they were in the furnace and Daddy, seeing Jesus is worth the fire.” It hit me like a brick in the forehead! I knew she was right! We had experienced Jesus during this dark time like we never had before and Jesus is worth the fire! I was immediately healed of my discouragement. When I arrived at the place I was to preach I told them, “open your Bibles to Daniel chapter 3” and I preached a powerful message called Jesus Is Worth The Fire. I finished the sermon with the last verse of Daniel chapter 3 which is verse 30 “Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to even higher positions in the province of Babylon.” The furnace is for promotion! The only thing that burns is your bonds! You are thrown in tied up but after the Fourth Man appears your bonds are loosed and you walk out without the smell of smoke on you! This was perhaps the most prophetic sermon of my life and I have now preached it all over the world.

Our furnace was the launching pad for our greatest, most miraculous, season of ministry we have ever seen so far.



Shortly after, Rebekah moved to Inner City Los Angeles to work at the Dream Center for a year and quickly rose through the ranks to become a leader there.

At 22 years of age she became the “Adopt A Block” leader for Nickerson Gardens, the largest government housing projects west of the Mississippi. God used her mightily there.

I continued traveling regularly to Colombia, preaching and rescuing orphans.

One day I received a phone call. When I answered I heard Mercy’s voice say, “Daddy this is Mercy.” I said, “Oh, Mercy! We love you! We miss you!” then I heard a click and she was gone but my heart soared with joy. We prayed all the rest of the day and the next morning my phone rang again and it was Mercy. “Daddy, do you forgive me?” I said, “Yes sweetheart! Do you forgive us?” Before long she was back home and in the fall of 2011 we had a marathon to raise money for orphans and Mercy ran and came in second in her age group! There is a God. He is mighty. And He loves us.

In January of 2012 I decided that I would take one whole day with a yellow legal pad and pen until I could come up with what I thought God wanted me to spend the rest of my life doing and I hoped to be able to articulate it in a single sentence.

After praying and crying all day and writing, writing, writing I stepped outside to prayer-walk around the apartment complex. One moment, while praying, I stopped, looked into the night sky and said out loud, "Lord, I just want to know what Your mission critical is for me!" I froze. That's it! That's what the name of our ministry will be. I ran inside and searched to see if Mission Critical International had already been used as a ministry name and it looked clean! Later that night I identified my one sentence mission critical... "Passionately pursuing Jesus on His mission among the nations and mobilizing others to join us in this holy adventure!"

That Spring I flew to Los Angeles to spend a week working in the streets with Rebekah. It was one of the most thrilling weeks of my life and we founded Mission Critical International that week.

We worked one night trying to come up with a logo for the ministry with no success. I climbed into one of the bunkbeds in the Dream Center for a good nights sleep and I had a dream. In the dream, I saw the current logo of our ministry today on a billboard. The next morning I excitedly grabbed my Macbook and created what I had seen in my dream. It is precious to us. When I got home and shared with my son, Luke, what the Lord had showed me in L.A. he was so excited that we worked and worked to develop the website our ministry has today.

2013 was a year of much sickness for me but God was preparing me. He was keeping me hungry for Him. I spent a third of the year in bed and finances were at an all time low but it was the beginning of the promotion for sure. My sweet wife, Lisa, got a job working at Walmart to keep us from being homeless. God miraculously called her into her life's calling later, but I'm getting ahead of myself again...



In January, Rebekah who was 24-years-old at the time came to me and said, "Daddy, I know you love Colombia but God is calling me to Africa!" I said, "Great! That makes sense since He gave you an African sister. "That has been on my mind as well." she said. She worked hard and God provided. She left for Zambia, Africa in March 2013 to live in the bush, with no running water and no electricity, to help establish an orphanage! She fell in love with the people, the country, and the continent.

She lived there for two years and the stories of the miracles will have to fill another book but here are excerpts from her journal:

*May 26, 2013 - One pastor's recent visit he brought a children's Bible for me to read to the children. I have never see anyone as exited about having a Bible as these children were. With the limited English they know they couldn't understand the New Testaments we had given them but they still wanted me to read the Bible to them. So now having a Bible they can understand and with pictures of the stories is the best gift they could*

have been given. All of the children here are so enthusiastic about learning anything about Jesus and the Bible. They ask me every day to read the Bible for them and to sing a worship song with them. Even though they can't always understand the words I am singing they still want me to sing about Jesus with them. I have taught them the song *Here I am to Worship* and they know *Open the Eyes of My Heart*, so anytime they are playing or walking home from school I hear them singing to the top of their voices. There is nothing like hearing children worship God with innocent and pure faith. I am reminded of Mark



10:14, Jesus said to them, "permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all." I want nothing more than to encourage and strengthen that child-like faith in the children here in Zambia. Love, Rebekah

March 4, 2014 - One of the highlights of my week here in Zambia is our weekly women's Bible study that I lead on Tuesday afternoons under the big Mango tree. I have developed a close friendship with every one of the ladies of our Bible study group. For the last month we've been studying through the Psalms and we've enjoyed every minute of our study. Last week we were in Psalm 123:3 "Be gracious to us, O Lord, be gracious to us, for we are greatly filled with contempt." We talked about how no matter what others think of you or say about you, God will always be gracious to you and He is always for us. If God called us, no man can stand in our way. We must always believe what God says about us not what others say about us. The ladies really opened up to how at times they almost give up because of what their family or friends have said about them and because their families don't believe in them. I told the ladies, "Only God can give us our worth and if He is on our side we can always accomplish our tasks." Please pray our Bible study and pray for victory in the lives of all these ladies. Love, Rebekah

Later, Rebekah wrote this regarding that same Bible Study:

June 1, 2014 Sitting in the shade of a mighty mango tree, tears filled my eyes as I watched Emelia teach our ladies Bible study. I thank God every Tuesday for our community of ladies who come faithfully every week. I am so grateful now to see them step up and teach what God has placed on their hearts. To see these ladies, grow in their faith to the point where they are willing to lead and teach one of our Bible studies is an amazing blessing. I know they are closer in their relationship with God and their understanding of the Bible has grown as well. It is also amazing to see these women grow closer in their friendship with each other. One thing about our Bible study that is unique is that these women come from many different churches and yet here we all meet together to study the word of God together. Emelia talked about how influential we, as



*women, are and how we should be the first ones to call our neighbor and friends to come to church or our Bible studies. Our ladies have taken ownership of our Bible study and they are the ones who are planning ways to grow our Bible study. I am so grateful to be able to learn from these ladies as much as if not more than I am teaching them. They have already taught me so much about the power of prayer and I know they will teach me so much more! Love Rebekah*

My daughter Brooke, 17-years-old at the time, spent the summer in Colombia working in an orphanage and God planted seeds in her heart that would take a couple more years to come to fruition.

My daughter, Beverly, was married that spring, against our wishes, to a supposed recovered addict and ex-con 15 years older than her. He talked a good talk of knowing and loving Jesus. Out of my love for her, I performed the ceremony, holding out hope for them. But sadly, five months into their marriage, he was arrested and sent back to prison. Spiritual warfare is real. Our daughter spiraled dramatically and after some life-threatening experiences God got ahold of her and she moved back home. One day, she had a vision of our whole family, holding hands, walking across the sky above the nations, and as we passed by, souls were pulled up from the nations to join us. She gathered up some yellow poster board and began to write our dreams for the future of our ministry and hand them up all around the house on the curtain rods. Every single one of those miracle dreams would eventually come true plus a lot more. Today she is happily married to a man of her dreams and our dreams and they have a beautiful little girl named Lily who owns all of our hearts. God's power is also real.

I was planning in early October 2013 to travel to Bogota, Colombia on my first mission trip with our oldest son Luke. Yes, you are correct, nothing can stop me from going to Colombia... when my dear friend Bruce surprised me with an invitation to Newport Beach, California the first weekend of September to wed his two precious daughters in a dual ceremony atop a 300 foot yacht in the harbor. The first of many miracles began when I stood at the altar of my church and my pastor, Frankie, prayed over me for healing. I never spent another day in bed after that.

The morning we were to leave for Newport Beach, Lisa and I were at the airport. We knew God had to be our source because we only had \$11.00 to our name, didn't know how we would finance our stay in Newport Beach, where the money would come from to go to Colombia in 3 weeks, and much more. While we were waiting in line to get on the plane I received a message from Colombia that there was violent rioting throughout the country and maybe we shouldn't come. We took a deep breath, asked the Lord to take over, and walked onto the plane. Everything miraculously worked out and we had a glorious trip to California. The next week, Luke and I traveled to Colombia together and teamed up with a wonderful interpreter I had met on a previous trip named Oscar.



We spent a week in the orphanages and then Oscar said, "I have pastors from 4 churches asking me to have you come and preach while you are here." I said, "Great! Let's do it." Luke, Oscar, and I went to 4 churches in two days. I preached a sermon that God had blown my mind with a few weeks before as I was reading Mark chapter 2. The sermon was entitled Recipe For A Miracle and God used it on this trip in miraculous ways that I had never before experienced. Whole

crowds would flood to the altar at the end of the sermon weeping and crying out loud to God in desperation for Him.

The anointing was so obvious that the pastors said, "Please, come back and do a trip that is just preaching crusades!" And so, we started praying and planning for such a trip to be scheduled in the spring of 2014.

Spiritual and financial miracles were happening all around us and we began to see that we were being "promoted to even higher positions in the province of Babylon."

## **23: Global Evangelism Ignites -**

***“Reckon then that to acquire soul-winning power, you will have to go through mental torment and soul distress. You must go into the fire if you are going to pull others out of it.” — C.H. Spurgeon***

I received an invitation to come to Colombia for Easter Week, 2014 and preach in a colosseum! At the same time, I was invited to go on a mission trip to Rebekah’s project in Zambia. I was perplexed. I prayed and prayed. One morning, the solution came to me but it was radical. Lisa could go to Zambia in my place and I could fulfill the invitation in Colombia. Rebekah really wanted me to come but I knew she would take her mother coming over me any day. But, my wife had never crossed the Atlantic and had made it very clear to the family that she never would. So, how do I go about asking her to take this huge leap of faith. She had been awhile in her prayer closet earlier that morning and was now propped up in bed doing her devotions. No man in his right mind tangles with a redhead so with trepidation I said, “This is going to sound crazy, but would you consider going to Zambia in my place and representing Mission Critical so I can go preach in Colombia?” To my great surprise she said, “Yes, I will go. The Lord told me this morning to ‘prepare to travel’ and now I know what He was talking about.” Wow! I couldn’t believe it.

Lisa had a wonderful two weeks in Zambia. Her favorite memory was waking up one morning and hearing the children as they did their laundry, singing the song she had taught them the day before. “Oh, wonderful, wonderful day! He washed my sins away.”

Shortly after, I was sitting in my recliner ordering plane tickets to Colombia, when my daughter Brooke, who was working full time and in nursing school and scaring us to death with her lifestyle because she had become greatly discouraged by church people, came over and sat on the arm of my chair and said, “Hey dad, I want to go to Colombia with you.” I said, “Don’t tease me like that, I would love for you to go.” She said, “I’m serious! I have the money. Please order my plane ticket.” And so, I did.

We flew to Colombia in early April and met our interpreter Oscar, whom Brooke had never met. The next three weeks were some of the most miraculous of my life as we preached all over central and northern Colombia. In one of the crusades in Bogota, I preached with an evangelist from Austria, Hans Schmid (now in heaven). After one of my sermons he said, “That is the most powerful message I have ever heard in my life. Are you on TV, radio, or the internet?” I said, “No sir.” He said, “You will be. The world will hear from you. The Gospel is fire-hot when the preacher is burning for Jesus in his spirit. Then rivers of fire will flow from him.” I hugged him and immediately sensed that God was showing me that this was my personal mission critical from now on.

Brooke was so blown away by the Holy Spirit on this trip that she came to me crying. I said, “What’s wrong sweetie?” She said, “Daddy, God is calling me to Colombia full-time but I’m scared. I’m only 20-years-old.” I said, “But God called you right?” She said, “Absolutely.” I said, “Well, He’s a lot older than that so you will be fine.” she quit her job, quit school, and moved to Colombia.

Brooke began working first in a wonderful orphanage in Medellin, Colombia with our dear sister Enith, whom I call the Mother Teresa of Colombia. God supernaturally anointed Brooke as she moved into this orphanage at 20-years-of-age speaking only a tiny bit of Spanish in a place where no one spoke any English and within a few months she was completely fluent in Spanish with a perfect accent. Miraculous!



Not only that, Brooke and Oscar, my interpreter and best friend in Colombia, fell in love. He video conferenced me one night about some ministry updates and when we finished he said nervously, "There is something else I need to talk to you about." I said, "Oscar, I'm really tired, can we talk tomorrow?" He said, "No sir." I said, "Ok... go ahead." He said nervously, "Well, I've wanted to ask your blessing to date Brooke." I laughed and said, "Lisa and I have been waiting to hear from you. Of course, you can! Good night." and I closed the computer. What a blessing! Brooke worked there a year touching scores of lives and then moved to Bogota to work for Mission Critical.

Here is an excerpt from Brooke's blog during her time in Medellin:

*April 19, 2015 - I was honestly scared to death as I stepped out of the crowded taxi and immediately smelled the stench of drugs, urine, trash and a lot of people who have not bathed in only God knows how long. Rosita (the head honcho of the street ministry and a very sweet friend), Alex, Omar, Karen, Carolina (all young adults who are part of the 50 kids we care for day in and day out) and I were back once again on the streets of Medellin hunting souls and meeting needs. But as always it is not a fairy tale setting, nor is it filled with beautiful people who just happen to be in*



*the wrong place at the wrong time and need saving. No, as we began unloading the boxes of sandwiches, hot chocolate, personal hygiene items and rice I couldn't help but feel very nervous being literally surrounded by men, women and young teenagers who had obviously been living in the street for a very long time and who simply stared at us. Some eyes reflected curiosity, others contemplating the possibility of valuables to steal and still others held pure disdain for the "do gooders" who were back again. Our mission tonight was not exactly the streets but a "hotel", if you can call it that, actually it was more like a cramped, wet, smoke filled, roach infested community drug house where over 150+ men, women and children live their lives day in and day out spending a very little amount to live there 24/7 and sometimes just pay for their children to live there alone and uncared for. Try to imagine the worst motel you have ever been in and then times that by 4. The fear continued to grip my heart as I made my way to the staircase but soon vanished as I was met by three tiny brown faces smiling and yelling "Chocolate! Chocolate!" One little boy wrapped his arms around my neck and used me as a ride up the stairs. I am glad he knew how to hang on because I had a 5 gallon jug of hot chocolate in one hand and a 15 pound bag of rice in the other plus this little boy around my neck and walking upstairs, lets just say my physical strength was really being tested. As soon as we entered the door a flood of little 1-4-year-old kids jumping up and down and asking to be held met us. Let me tell you a bit about these beautiful little kids. None of them were completely dressed. The majority only had some old dirty sweats on and no shoes, socks or shirts and the others were completely naked from head to toe. Everyone was dirty and in serious need of a tissue. They were malnourished and had their faces, legs, and arms painted with Indian cultural markings and bleached hair. I will never forget the moment when Nancy (a little 2-year-old girl) stood on her toes and stretched her arms up to me wanting me to hold her. I picked her up and was immediately sickened by the fact that her little sweats were completely soaked by her own urine. But at the same I was so happy and touched*

*to see her little face smiling at me. She followed me around the rest of the night and I never was able to find out to whom she belonged. We took some time to go room to room inviting everyone to come to the main patio (where they all individually cook over a "hole in the concrete" stove with wood and fire) to receive the gospel and food. We started with the kids by sharing "The shepherd who left the 99 to look for the one" Bible story and giving them chips, sandwiches, candy and hot chocolate. I had to hand feed the sandwich to a little one-year-old who weighed no more than 10 pounds tops (I am not exaggerating). She was tiny and was not able to feed herself. Afterwards we shared the gospel with the adults who behaved a lot worse than the children. The adults were fighting, arguing, yelling and cursing us but we were able to feed them as well. All in all, it was a very eye-opening experience and I can't wait to go back. It is not easy, especially seeing people live that way, and what is worse seeing children live that life. But instead of letting that damage my faith and cause me to complain to God about why He would allow those things to happen, it fuels my faith even more and my passion to pursue the broken and realize that God in His great love and mercy is using me to help these people and to help bring them to Himself. Of course, we don't always see the fruit of our labor right away or maybe never in this life, but I know God used us that night to plant a seed in their hearts and He is in charge of growing that seed, all we have to do is go where He leads us and love whomever He puts in front of us. "Where You go I go, What You say I say, What You pray I pray, What You pray I pray. Jesus only did what He saw You do, He would only say what he heard You speak, He would only move when He felt You lead following Your heart, following Your spirit. How could I expect to walk without You when every move that Jesus made was in surrender I will not begin to live without You, for You only are worthy, You are always good. You are always good. Though the world sees and soon forgets, we will not forget who you are and what you've done for us, what you've done for us." "Where you go I go"- Jesus Culture. Love Brooke*

Later, Brooke would take me to "Hotel Hell" as we affectionally called it and I was blessed to experience the pain and the presence of God in that place. God continued to tug at my heart for more crusades around the globe and my phone began to blow up with requests for me to come to 5 continents.

So far, I had only been going to Colombia but I knew there was more to come.

Unfortunately, there is always spiritual warfare swirling about while the miracles are happening. In August, 2014 our Navy sailor son, Levi, whose wife, the girl we took in and rescued from abuse that I shared about in a former chapter, had just left him for a woman, became angry, gave place to the devil, had taken up with multiple other women each unbeknownst to the other and was under tremendous stress in the military. The day before we were leaving on another trip to Colombia he suffered a psychological break and ended up on Fox News naked and swinging a sword over his head before the police took him down. He was put in an ambulance and was in and out of multiple mental hospitals over the next few weeks. Because he was Navy, we were not allowed to see him or help in any way. When we take seriously Jesus's last words spoken on this planet (Acts 1:8) and begin taking ground for the kingdom of light and pushing back the darkness, we will experience a battle fiercer than anyone could have imagined.

Two months later, October, 2014, our daughter Rebekah was forced to come home from Zambia on an emergency medical flight. She had been suffering with pneumonia for months and the antibiotics they were giving her at the village clinic weren't helping. She could have died. She lay on our couch for 6 weeks as her mom nursed her back to health. One night in late December, she and I were sitting on the balcony of our apartment talking and praying and she said, "Daddy, you have to come to Africa with me!

I want you to see my orphanage and meet my children, you have to preach for Pastor Mbewe, meet Pastor Tendai, and we have to go to Rwanda and preach for Pastor Ndagijimana! Africa seemed to me as far away as the moon. I had never even crossed the Atlantic! I quickly figured out a budget of what it would take to do all that she asked. "Rebekah, it would take \$10,000 to do what you are saying." I said. She replied, "That's OK Daddy. God has \$10,000. Let's pray right now." I sheepishly bowed my head and she prayed so boldly that God would give us \$10,000 soon so we could go. Then she lifted her smiling face and said, "There Daddy! We are going to Africa!" I gulped and said, "Yeah, great, sure." We didn't tell another soul about that conversation and yet two days later a man mysteriously wired \$10,000 into my bank account!!!! We quickly bought our tickets and left for Africa in mid-January 2015! Oh, the miracles! Oh, the crusades! Oh, the joy!

First, we would spend a week in Zambia and then we would head to Rwanda. I was blessed to preach in a church in Mashikili, Zambia. The night before, I sent a message to Jerry Johnston, the evangelist who led me to Christ and said, "Tomorrow will be my first time to preach on the African Continent and I can't quit thinking about you. Thank you for leading me to Christ." It was a heavenly day.

I had one of the most thrilling and humbling weeks of my life at Rebekah's project. The children were so loving and it was humbling to walk through the village and have people come up and touch me and say, "You are Miss Rebekah's father, how blessed you are." One day she took me way back in the bush to meet her friends. We would walk up to a little mud hut and the people would come and take me by the hand and say reverently, "Will you please pray over our home? Will you bless our home with your presence?" We would sit and talk awhile and pray and bless them. On the Friday morning before we were to leave for Rwanda on Tuesday, we were in the bush and Rebekah stopped to use an outhouse. When she came out, she was white as a sheet and trembling. "What's wrong?" I asked. She said, "Daddy, I just dropped my passport in the outhouse. Oh, my goodness! We had to fly to Rwanda in a few days. I, like a Superdad, grabbed a long stick and said, "Don't worry, I will fish it out." I worked and I worked, sweat pouring from my brow and I succeeded in pushing it down deeper and deeper into the latrine. Finally, Rebekah said, "Dad, we need to go to the U.S. embassy in Lusaka, the capital city." We called a driver, waited for him for 2 hours, then made the 2-hour trip to Lusaka and pulled up to the Embassy at 2 p.m. on Friday. The guard at the front gate said, "Sorry, this is Friday, the embassy closes at noon on Fridays." We turned around and made the 2-hour trip back to the project. Oh, how we prayed Saturday and Sunday! Monday morning, we went back to the embassy. Rebekah went in and explained everything. Everyone started laughing, coming out of their cubicles, the news spread quickly, "This girl dropped her passport in a Zambian toilet!" They laughed and laughed and then said, "Don't worry, young lady, we will have you out of here with a new passport before noon." They all jumped in and worked on it and sure enough we made our flight to Rwanda! Praise God!

On the flight from Zambia to Rwanda on January 28th, 2015 I wrote this prayer list.

2015

Zambia PTL, Rwanda PTL, Colombia PTL, Belize PTL, Peru?  
Dream Center Bogota (Being answered in 2020!)  
Colombia preaching tour (Answered in 2017!)

2016

Nepal (Answered April 2018!)  
Africa preaching tour (Answered July 2016!)

South America preaching tour

2017

Asia preaching tour (Answered April 2018)  
Dream Center Zambia

2018

???

Another story from that trip I have to tell is the night that the Rwandan pastor set it up for me to preach on a secular public radio station in the capital city of Kigali. Rebekah, the pastor, a wonderful interpreter named Jash, and I sat down in the studio and I preached from my heart the sermon Jesus Is Worth The Fire. I told the Rwandans how it had touched me to see that they had gone through the furnace of the 1994 genocide but they had found Jesus in the fire and what a blessing it was to see them healed as a nation and hungry for God. When I finished the sermon everyone in the room including the DJ was weeping. The DJ said, "You preach really well pastor. Can you please come back tomorrow night and preach twice?" On the way back to the missionary compound that night the pastor's phone kept ringing and ringing. Unbeknownst to us, the radio station had given out the pastor's phone number after the sermon for anyone who wanted to know more about God. He received over 100 calls that night of people accepting Christ as Lord and Savior. The next night we were so late coming back from visiting the pastor's sister's orphanage in southern Rwanda that our scheduled airtime had passed and the next program was in session. When the DJ saw that we had arrived they suspended the other program and immediately put me on the air and I preached a sermon entitled Can God? Walking In The Miracle and then recorded a second sermon entitled Passionate Pursuit Of Jesus to be aired the following night. Again, on our way to the missionary compound over 40 people called the pastor to say they wanted to follow Jesus. Only God can do these things and He wants us to join Him in them.

Lisa was spending huge amounts of time in her prayer closet and we were so grateful! Here is a poem I wrote about it...

#### A Praying Wife

I awake and see that she's not sleeping  
From the closet a flicker of light is peeping

I know she's on her prayer rug, little candles glowing  
She's reading and she's praying and her impact is growing

I can picture the little altar in our closet she has fashioned  
Then I hear her muffled cries and pleas so impassioned

For her family and the nations her heart is pouring out  
I think of all the miracles her prayers have brought about

In our teens I would preach and she would always pray  
And now three decades later it's still the same today

Oh, the blessing of a mighty praying wife  
And without her oh, how powerless my life

“Should I get a job?” she asks when funds are getting low  
Without a moment’s hesitation I have to answer “No!”

“I need you in the prayer closet, nothing else will do”  
“The finances will come but what we need is you”

The warfare we face each day too quickly could consume us  
Without the mighty blessings that she brings down upon us

No force in earth or hell can cause us to despair  
When we know that Mama is in the place of prayer

By Matt Bullen, June 13, 2015

Things began to really explode in 2015! The Holy Spirit put two words on my heart over and over again... CHARGE HARD! And we did. Rebekah and I came home from Africa, spoke at a Tres Dias retreat, then headed out for more crusades in Colombia. Then we went to Belize and preached a week-long crusade in the dump on Ambergris Caye! Wonderful moves of God. Then we went back to Colombia with a mission team. Oh, what a glorious trip. We went on to Medellin where we were blessed to speak in the one of the most dangerous prisons in the world! The fire fell!

Here is an excerpt from Brooke’s blog about the prison visit:

*June 1, 2015 - I have never been to a prison in my life... let alone a prison known to be one of the most violent prisons in the world (inmates once played soccer there with a severed human head). Here we were just a little group of five Mission Critical International missionaries against this Goliath of 7,000 inmates. To say we were a bit nervous is a gross understatement but we marched in unsure of what we would find but confident that God was already there, waiting for us. As we walked through I saw dozens and dozens of men... some were sitting, some playing basketball and various games, and some just stood in groups and stared at us. My dad Matt Bullen (Executive Director of Mission Critical) had been invited to preach and minister to the men in their weekly, inner prison church service. I was expecting to see a group of 20-30 men quiet, grave and uninterested in what we had to say. I expected them to solely be attending to get early release and for the service to be rough and spiritually dry. Being completely wrong has never given me more joy. As we walked up the stairs to the chapel we could hear a great crowd praising God. I could hardly believe my eyes when I walked into a room filled with more than one hundred men worshipping in a way that I cannot even try to explain in words. These men were so full of love for God, it was written all over their faces. Some raised their hands, some were on their knees, and others were even jumping up and down filled with joy. I have never before experienced a worship service like this one. The Holy Spirit was heavy in the room as each man listened intently to my dad preach about Grace, Salvation and God’s heart for each of us. They clapped, shouted, cried, and praised God. When the service ended each man came and shook our hands and some hugged us and thanked us earnestly for coming to visit them. Honestly, I felt more at home in that little chapel in an infamous Colombian prison than in most Christian Churches I have attended in my life. The love they had for their Savior inspired me and even shamed me a bit. Most of these men came to Christ inside the prison but I have known Jesus for years and yet at times do not*

*crave His presence like they do. I think we thought we were there to minister but in the end, it turned out that we were the ones being ministered to. Later we were informed that what we saw in the chapel was only 10 percent of the Christian community inside the prison that in total there were about 1,000 men that profess faith and participate in the weekly services throughout the prison's 16 sections. I will never forget when one of the church leaders who himself is an inmate and former police officer told us "I used to be in the police force, but now I am a soldier in God's army". God touched all of our hearts that day and we left with smiles on our faces. It reminded me of the story in Luke 7 where the woman comes and washes Jesus' feet in Simon's house. As I saw the love of these wonderful sons of God and their joyful hearts I could not get out of my mind what Jesus said in verse 47... "I tell you, her sins—and they are many—have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love." "Who here among us has not been broken? Who here among us is without guilt or pain? So oft abandoned by our transgressions. If such a thing as grace exists then grace was made for lives like this. There are no strangers, there are no outcasts, there are no orphans of God" - Orphans of God by Avalon. Love Brooke*

Here is an excerpt from my journal dated June 23, 2015 that expresses my joy serving Jesus during this period:

*In John 4 the disciples return from a food run. They had left their Master hungry and exhausted sitting next to a well but now they return to find Him speaking with a Samaritan woman, which was totally taboo, but they don't have the nerve to ask Him, "What are you doing Jesus?" and then when she leaves strangely He doesn't even seem anxious to eat the food they have brought Him. They urge Him to eat and His timeless reply is*

*John 4:32 "I have a kind of food you know nothing about."*

*Jesus had just shared a tender moment with a lost daughter of Eve and her life would never be the same again and the joy of that encounter and of fulfilling His Father's mission was better than earthly food.*

*John 4:34 Then Jesus explained: "My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing his work."*

*I think about this passage all the time. When I look at my own life and ministry I can honestly say that the fuel for pressing harder and harder into the harvest comes from the joy of those tender moments where Jesus shows up, touches someone through me, and changes their life. Having a taste of that "kind of food" becomes a holy addiction that I wouldn't trade for anything in this world. I woke this morning thinking of and praising God for the almost countless "Jacob's well" experiences that He has blessed me with in just the last few months and for the immense joy and motivation they bring to my life.*

*I think of the discouraged pastor in his 50's who hugged me weeping after I preached at a pastor's conference in Bogota, Colombia and said, "I love you. I came today under a heavy burden and the Holy Spirit has refreshed me through you." Wow! Praise you Jesus!*

*I think of the young woman and her baby that I prayed for at the altar preaching in a church in Medellin, Colombia who when I laid my hands on her and her baby she collapsed to the floor as*



*I caught the baby. She gave her heart to Jesus. I later learned that she had never been in a church service before and had never heard the gospel before. She had gone to borrow some clothes from a neighbor and they had asked her to come with them to church and hear the American preacher... Only God...*

*I think of the woman who came forward in a crusade in Medellin, Colombia who when I laid my hands on her threw up on the floor. After the church leadership and I gathered around her and prayed, she stood up and testified that she hadn't been to church in 10 years and had been living for the devil but she was giving her whole life to Jesus.*

*I think of the woman that I "randomly" sat next to at a ministry meeting whom I had never met before who weeping promptly began to share with me her whole story of horrible abuse and neglect as she kept saying, "I don't know why I am telling you all of this." I knew. Jesus wanted to hear her story and give her living water because that's what He does...*

*I think of the 16-year-old boy accompanying me on a mission trip who broke down and fell into my arms weeping as he watched the Holy Spirit sweep across a church service in Colombia. That young man will never be the same.*

*I think of the discouraged pastor in his 30's who wept out his hunger for God as I laid hands on him and prayed over him as he knelt on the board floor of a little church on stilts in a slum in Belize.*

*I think of the father of a missionary girl in Colombia who wet the front of my suit with his tears as he hugged me and would not let me go after a sermon I preached in Bogota, Colombia on missions.*

*I think of the drunk man with the big black eye who wet the front of my shirt with his tears as I held him and shared Jesus with him on the side of a road in Belize and afterward said to me, "You are so powerful. Where do you get such power?" And I had the opportunity to tell him.*

*I think of the young man who hugged me and would not let me go at the end of a sermon I preached in one of the most violent prisons in the world in Medellin, Colombia. The tears on his glowing face evidence that he had tasted living water.*

*I think of the man with a large open cancerous lesion on his face who came forward after my sermon in Sopo', Colombia one night and asked me to pray for him for healing. I prayed hard for him. The next night as the crusade began he came up to me beaming a great smile with tears in his eyes thanking me profusely. I was utterly stunned! The cancerous sore was completely gone like it had never been there! Praise Jesus!*

*I think of the precious 20-year-old pastor's daughter in Sibate', Colombia who after a miraculous night of ministry when her father asked her to join him in praying over me and my ministry broke down weeping and held onto me as she choked out her prayer between great sobs asking God to continue anointing me so that souls continue to be healed through my ministry as she had seen that night. How do you compare anything this world offers with that?*

*I think of the youth teacher, Graham, that I met with in a coffee shop in Houston and challenged him to go to the nations and find fertile soil for his teachings and he since has gone to over 20 countries and God has used him mightily.*

*To His praise and glory alone and by His grace alone I could literally tell of dozens more of these tender moments in the presence of Jesus as He transforms, heals, loves, encourages, and restores lives that I have experienced and enjoyed just in the last few months... no drug, no sin, no bank account, no toy, no vacation, no fame, no fortune, nothing can compete with that. It's a "kind of food" that the world does not know about and the greatest prayer of my life is "Oh God give me more! Live your life through me! Quench their thirst!" This is what keeps me desperate for God. It's a holy addiction I can't live without... and neither could Jesus...*

The Lord stirred this poem in my heart:

### The Pulpit –

I wait for You with heart aflame  
My moment to declare your Name

My fiercest prayer is Holy Fire  
Their greatest need is fresh desire

No matter what the text or title  
The sermon subject is hunger for revival

For your glorious Presence I humbly plead  
Nothing more than Jesus we need

Let us feel You in this place  
Walk among us, kiss each face

Blow mighty breath of God  
Bursting through the cheap façade

Shatter the paralyzing shell of distraction  
The world has cocooned us with all its attraction

Help us refocus our attention on You  
You're our heart's desire if only we knew

Flatten the enemy with Your thundering voice  
Break all the chains let the prisoners rejoice

Fresh passion ignite in souls grown stale  
Let new life begin in those outside the veil

Heal broken hearts with your sweet embrace  
Shower us under the waterfall of grace

Give us Your vision of a world in need  
Fill us with boldness in word and in deed

Let the tears stream and the praises ring  
All is well... we have met with our King

By Matt Bullen, June 16, 2015

A few days later I received a call from a pastor in Monrovia, Liberia West Africa, our daughter Mercy's birth town. "Matt, would you please come and preach a crusade and do a youth rally and pastors training?" I instantly replied, "Yes! I have been praying for 7 years that God would let me go see my daughter's birth home! October? Yes, I will be there..."

Oh, my goodness! God was ramping this ministry UP!!!!

## 24: Mercy's House -

***“Our God is not like an iceberg but like a forest fire. Whatever he does shines brightly and is carried out with burning desire and a blazing purpose.” - Reinhard Bonnke***



I started putting out prayer requests to let our prayer warriors know that I was going to Liberia in October. My friend, Bruce, called and asked, “Mercy is going with you right?” I said, “Well brother, her passport is long expired and we have issues with her citizenship status and we don’t have time or money to get it all sorted out.” He said, “Matt! She has to go! Hire an immigration lawyer or whatever you have to do. I will pay for it. I will pay for her trip. She has to go!” I gulped and said, “Yes sir, I will get to work on it.” Long story short, many crazy miracles came together for this trip. We had to fly her to Washington D.C. to get a Liberian passport. There were so many complications. Finally, we found out that Mercy’s blood father’s brother went to law school with the

deputy ambassador of Liberia. He heard about our situation, walked into the embassy, and said, “Just add a new page to her old 2007 Liberian passport and I will sign it.” And they did. By pure miracle we boarded the plane on October 8, 2015 which “just happened to be” her 21st birthday and we flew to Monrovia, Liberia! But the miracles were only beginning.

As we were preparing to go, Mercy reconnected with her blood sister, Olive through Facebook, and let her know that we were coming to Monrovia. We arrived in Monrovia and drove to a gas station out in the bush where Mercy’s blood family was to meet us. I will never forget the next few moments. Their SUV pulled into the parking lot and Mercy’s biological father, full blood sister, and two half-sisters piled out of the vehicle all smiles. We embraced with tears in our eyes. They kept hugging me saying, “Thank you for saving Mercy!” “Thank you for saving Mercy!”

Then Mercy’s sister Olive came up and hugged me with tears in her eyes and said, “My American Daddy!” I thought my heart would burst out of my chest. What a beautiful night. But still more miracles were to come!

Later that week, we had a family reunion at Olive’s house and dozens of Mercy’s aunts, uncles, cousins, and other family members came. The most amazing thing was that her grandmother whom, she had lived with when she was a tiny girl, came that night. Up until that day, her grandmother had believed Mercy was dead. For years, the family told her that Mercy had “gone to America” to get well but her grandmother just knew that this was euphemistic for “she went to heaven.” When they met and embraced that night the angels in heaven must have been dancing and shouting. It was an amazing night. We ate and ate

wonderful Liberian dishes and laughed and told many stories. The most memorable thing for me was toward the end of the night when the family had Mercy and me stand and they all lined up and came forward crying, hugging me, thanking me, and presenting me with gifts. Then they “gowned me” with the garb of a village chief and declared me an Honorable Paramount Chief of Kalabeh Chiefdom.

And yet even more miracles were on their way...

I sensed that day in June 2015 when Pastor Paye called and asked me to preach a crusade and do pastor and youth seminars in Liberia that it was a message from the Lord but I simply could not have known how thrilling each and every service would be. What a joy to stand on that stage night after night and see the people flood from the surrounding villages and neighborhoods to hear the gospel and then to see the altar packed each night as hundreds came to trust in Jesus. Each day, we would visit a different school and share Jesus with the children, hold pastor seminars and youth seminars. The Spirit moved in power and I was overjoyed to be a part of it all. Thank you, Lord!



When Rebekah and I had visited Rwanda in January of that same year, we felt led, along with our brother Ndagijimana, to start a school and call it Mercy’s House in honor of our precious daughter, Mercy. Pastor Ndagijimana told us about a perfect piece of land that was available for \$10,000. We said, “We will pray.” A few months later we were having a prayer meeting with several ministry friends. At the end of the prayer a young woman approached Rebekah and myself. She was shaking and there were tears in her eyes. She said, “My husband and I need to talk to you right now.” We all four stepped into an adjacent space and she related how that during the prayer the Holy Spirit had told her to give the \$10,000 that she had just received the day before as an inheritance. She had quickly walked up to her husband to tell him what the Holy Spirit told her and before she could speak her husband said, “Yes.” She said, “You don’t even know what I was going to ask you.” He said, “Yes, I do and the answer is yes.” Then she looked at Rebekah and me, still trembling, and said, “So we are giving you the \$10,000 for Mercy’s House Rwanda. We were humbled and stunned. Today, there is a Mercy’s Nursery School, with some of the cutest children on earth, on that property.

Now, Mercy and I were in Liberia and I shared about a Mercy’s House with Pastor Paye and he was all in.

He told me about some land near Monrovia that would be perfect for a Mercy’s House. As I held little orphaned Liberian children in my arms as they came to hug on me every day, I knew we had to do this! We finished our trip and went back home praying that God would allow us to open a school in our daughter’s home town named after her.

As I’ve said before though, spiritual warfare is always around. While I was in Liberia, our son, Levi had another psychological break. He was found by the police wandering the streets of Atlanta, GA with no car, no phone, and no wallet. He had been wandering the streets for 36 hours. He was put in another mental hospital. He called his mother and said, “Please, come help me.” She and our oldest son Luke

drove to Atlanta from Houston and brought Levi home. For the next 30 months he stayed with us and for one year of that time, 2 of his daughters, lived with us and we loved and ministered to them.

Quickly after arriving home from Liberia we went to Colombia for another wonderful mission trip and then shortly after God provided the money for the land in Monrovia. Mercy's House was on the move to become a reality.

Praise God! CHARGE HARD INDEED!



## **25: Big Hairy Audacious God -**

***“You never have to advertise a fire. Everyone comes running when there’s a fire. Likewise, if your church is on fire, you will not have to advertise it. The community will already know it.” – Leonard Ravenhill***

January 1st, 2016, I spent New Year’s Day praying about what the next year would look like. 2015 had been so hard charging that I was sure 2016 would be more of a year of prayer and study and saving up money for another hard charging year in the future. Wow! Was I wrong! We started out the year with nearly no funds but I felt strongly that we should have a mission trip to Colombia in June and I had promised Pastor Ndagijimana the year before that I would come and do a large crusade in Rwanda in July of 2016 so I began to pray for these two dreams and yet assumed that they might not happen this year. I made three prayer lists. 1. Daily Needs, 2. Crazy Prayers (BIG things like those two trips that I was asking God for), and 3. BIG HAIRY AUDACIOUS Prayers (Stupid crazy big things that I was asking God for but would’ve been embarrassed for anyone to know about). The spring went by quietly as I had suspected but we did get the opportunity to financially help our friend Pastor Paye in Liberia put a roof on his church and get the plans and budget drawn up for Mercy’s House Liberia so that was good. Then God did some things so BIG and HAIRY that they hadn’t even made it onto my BIG HAIRY List!

The first thing God did was to gather together the largest mission team we had ever had to go to Colombia. But for Lisa and I the biggest shocker was that all of our children in the U.S. except Mercy were able to sign up for the trip and then God miraculously supplied their finances. It was mind blowingly awesome to arrive in Colombia and be met by Brooke and Oscar and our Colombian children Juan David, Ginary, and Heidi and granddaughter Adara. To stand in that airport with 8 of our 9 children, two sons-in-laws, and two grandchildren on a mission for God was craziness!

We had a marvelous week. Every morning our sons, Luke and Levi, rotated giving a wonderful devotion to the mission team at the hotel. Then we would set out for orphanages and street ministries to love and serve and share Jesus together. Our daughter, Beverly, and her husband, Travis, shared their testimony with the children at a safehouse for abuse, pregnant, girls. It was wonderful to see how God used their story to give these girls hope that past tragedies don’t define you or your future. We were blessed to touch so many lives it was surreal. Only God. It was heavenly! The crazy blessing of getting to stand at the top of a mountain overlooking Bogota and have this photo taken of all of us except Mercy, our daughter-in-law Misti, and some grandkids was unspeakably wonderful.



The 2nd mind blower God pulled on us began one night, a couple months before we went to Colombia, as Lisa and I drove to meet some precious friends for dinner. I had been praying hard for 18 months for this large crusade in Rwanda and we were now just 4 weeks away and I didn't have a dollar to my name. It gave me a headache trying to get the courage to call off the trip. As my wife drove us to meet this couple for dinner, I messaged Pastor Ndagijimana in Rwanda and said, "I'm so sorry brother. I want to come so bad but I haven't received the finances I have been praying for so I thought I should let you know now that I can't come next month." He almost instantly replied, "I'm sorry too. But I trust God. I'm sad though. There were many people waiting for you to come." I cried, pounded on the dash, and put my head in my hands. My wife asked, "What's wrong baby?" I told her and she asked, "Well, how much do you need?" I replied, "With everything we have going on, I need \$50,000." She replied, "God's not broke. Let's pray about it." I replied, "I've been praying about it for 18 months! The more I pray the less I have. If I pray for work, the work dries up. If I pray for donations, the donations stop coming. I don't know what to do!" She replied, "Then I'm going to pray about it. God's timing is best." She prayed and we arrived at the restaurant. We had a wonderful dinner and then our friends handed us an envelope and said, "This is really why we invited you to dinner. Please open it." Inside was a card that read, "Never stop dreaming big crazy dreams" and stapled to the card was a check for \$50,000 for our work in Liberia and Rwanda!!! My mouth fell open and I exclaimed, "What the heck?" They laughed. It was the most money I had ever held in my hand at one time in my life. We cried and hugged and headed home.

I quickly messaged Pastor Ndagijimana, "Hold it!!! A miracle just happened! Don't cancel anything! I will be there!" He wrote back, "Praise God!!!"

In a rapid series of other miracles my daughters Rebekah and Brooke, and son Levi were able to have provision and time to go and we flew to Rwanda July 13, 2016. Big Hairy Audacious Miracle!!



We met with Pastor Ndagijimana the first day and he blew our minds with a status report of Mission Critical International Rwanda (MCIR). In the year and a half since Rebekah and I first came and began to back him Pastor Ndagijimana had planted 5 churches in different parts of Rwanda and the government had approved them as MCIR churches named Celebration Church after our beloved home church in The Woodlands, Texas.

He had purchased two plots of land around Kigali, the capital city, for Mercy's House Rwanda and we had crusades set up in each of these new churches and locations.

We headed out to the western border of Rwanda and had stunning crusades. Then we headed to the northern border of Rwanda for more crusades. On the way, we came down a winding switchback road on a steep mountainside seeming to always be inches from the cliff face. We wound down and down and down and just as we finally straightened out on flat ground one of the tires flew off the van and went bouncing down the road as we careened to the side. Wow! Thank you, Lord, for letting the tire wait until we were off the cliff.

The next morning, we held a crusade on the borders of Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda. The crowds grew and grew until we had to move out into the street under tarps. Some of the men ran down to the local 7th Day Adventist Church and asked them if we could borrow their pews. They agreed and the men carried all of the pews out and put them in the muddy street. As the meeting was about to start and we were praying hard a whirlwind blew right through the crowd. We all trembled and looked at each other saying, "You saw that too right?" "Yes, yes we did." We had such a powerful meeting and then the rains came hard. We began to wonder if we would have to cancel that evenings crusade but at the moment the meeting was to start the rain stopped and the sun came out. I preached my favorite sermon, Recipe For A Miracle and when I gave the invitation the whole crowd of several hundred knelt with me in the muddy street praying for miracles. After we stood one very old woman came up to me and fell on her face at my feet and began kissing my feet and praying. I was deeply humbled and honored. Soon a group brought a young woman to my daughters and I who looked VERY large with child. They said, "Pastor, can you please pray over her. She is 12 months pregnant and cannot go into labor. She is waiting for the baby to die or for her to die." Stunned, we realized that we were in the middle of nowhere Africa without hospitals, doctors, or medicine of any kind and this lady needed a miracle. We laid hands on her and prayed like never before. Then the leaders whisked us away to the cars and we headed back to the capital city of Kigali and flew out the next morning for Houston. When we got home after the 30 hours of travel, our phones were blowing up with messages from the Rwandans. The young woman had given birth to a huge, healthy baby boy that very night after we prayed for her and she survived. Every year since, on the boy's birthday, they send me a photo of the little boy and say to me, "Miracle man, here is the little boy. When are you coming back to Rwanda for a healing crusade?" Only God knows the answer to that question but I am certainly humbly ready and available to be used to bring glory to our BIG HAIRY AUDACIOUS GOD.

In that three weeks so many miracles happened I can't list them all. We preached and sang all over the country, hundreds upon hundreds were saved and over 100 were subsequently baptized. People were

healed, land was donated, and on and on. When we got home we hired the contractor and started building Mercy's House Liberia! Way bigger than anything on my BIG HARRY list... Yes...

We had been praying for a year for our daughter Brooke's wedding to my wonderful friend, now son, Oscar.

God outdid Himself on August 20th, 2016 as almost all of our family once again traveled to Colombia.

We gathered in a quaint castle, and I was supernaturally blessed to walk Brooke down the aisle and then step up and officiate at their wedding.



Words can't describe the joy and fun we had that day.

A picture is worth a thousand words... Only God!

In June of 2016, my son-in-law Oscar, had introduced me to Carlos, the head of outreach for YWAM in Colombia. He told Oscar that he had many jungle pastors and smaller towns on the West coast of Colombia that needed help, but no foreign pastors they had asked before were willing to go. Oscar laughed, "Ha, dad will go anywhere" and so we booked a trip for February 2017.

Early in January 2017 our family met together and we all agreed that 2017 would be the year of miracles.

We made and published a video on social media called "2017 the year of miracles" (<https://youtu.be/oogOFzjWQAk>) to share our heart's dream but we couldn't have known what that was going to mean.

In late January Levi and Rebekah headed to Zambia, Africa to minister to her friends and visit the children at the project she worked at for 2 years. Here is an excerpt from a blog she wrote during that trip.

*The majority of people I've met spend most of their lives searching for God's will for them. What I find sad about this is a lot of them never achieve the mission God has for them because they are always looking for this illusive Will of God. What I have learned is God's will for me is the same as for anyone. Jesus gave us a very clear mission when He ascended into heaven. Acts 1:8 "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."*

*God's will for my life and yours is to be His witnesses. We are to witness to what He has done in our lives. Tell others what you know to be true about God because of what He has done in your*



*life. I can be a witness to the fact that God answers prayer because of prayers He has crazily answered for me over the years.*

*What can you witness to about God? What do you know to be a fact about Him, no matter what anyone else says but He has proved it to you over the years? No one can convince me that my God is not good because He has proven His goodness to me so many times!*

*"I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." – Psalm 27:13*

*I am writing this from Zambia, Africa. Two years ago, when I worked here full time, I would have told you that I knew without a doubt the Will of God for my life was me living and working here for the rest of my life. Because I, like a lot of people I know, had this idea that God's will is a job, person to marry, status, or a church. I thought that God's will for me had more to do with a location than what I was actually doing. So, when I became very ill and had to move back home to Texas two years ago, I had a crisis of faith and fell into a deep depression. But slowly, God started to speak to my broken heart and tell me He was more concerned with what my life was telling the world about Who He is than about where I lived.*

In early February, I flew to Bogota for 3-weeks to conduct leadership training and preach crusades in some of the hard places of Colombia. The Holy Spirit flooded the trip. My first crusade was in a storefront church in Soacha, a slum near Bogota. The second night, I prayed with a weeping teenage hit-man on the run from his gang after the service. I believe he'll be a powerful warrior in God's army now.

Next, we had an amazing time training precious jungle pastors in Quibdo. The next Sunday, I preached in a church in a barrio so dangerous our taxi driver didn't want to take us there even though there were police everywhere with machine guns. We finally talked him into getting us close enough and walked from there. The praise and worship was crazy powerful. They read Psalm 146:9 *The Lord protects the foreigners among us.* and thanked God that they were going to be blessed because they were hosting a foreigner, me. I was deeply blessed and humbled.

On February 12, 2017 I wrote in my journal,

*Another landmark day for our family... One son and daughter preaching in Africa and me and another son and daughter preaching together in South America... God is amazing*

Then came a huge city-wide crusade in the mountain town of Montelibano. They set up a large stage in the street and on the first night we preached to over a 1,000 people. Many gave their lives to Christ. The second night, we preached to 1,500 people and the third night to over 2,500 people and hundreds were saved or rededicated their lives to Christ. In total, over those three days, we shared the gospel with 5,000.

Brooke, Oscar, and I were bursting with joy and rejoicing at what God did in this city. It was the largest crowds I had ever preached to in my life. On the last night, I turned to Brooke and said, "I can go to heaven now. It can't get better than this." She said, "Dad! Don't say it like that." If I had only known... but I'm getting ahead of myself again...



In one of the leadership training sessions I spoke at, I noticed that the host pastor was having an animated conversation with Brooke. After I finished speaking, I pulled her aside and asked if anything was wrong. She smiled and said, “No Dad, the pastor was just telling me that he wished he had heard you when he was in his twenties instead of now at sixty because he would have changed the world.” Over those three weeks, I was deeply convicted that this type of ministry needed to happen all over the world. The Holy Spirit moved so powerfully and so many were saved and encouraged, I knew that this was what I was born to do and this was my personal Mission Critical. Thrillingly I was invited by 18 countries that spring to do that very thing.

The month of March was all about awesome and anointed Tres Dias retreats and getting Mercy’s House Liberia up and roofed. It was so thrilling to see the walls go up. When we finished the roof, I planned to go, in May of 2017, and hold crusades and see the project!

I was also planning and praying for a trip, in June, to preach to tens of thousands in Pakistan. I was also praying for a leadership training and crusade trip to central Africa in August, and so on!

But then, tragedy struck...



## **26: Disaster... BUT GOD! -**

***“Men ablaze are invincible. Hell trembles when men kindle. The strongholds of Satan are invincible against everything but fire.”  
- Samuel Chadwick***

On Tuesday, April 11th, 2017 I left the house for a routine inspection of an office building to make a little money to help finance our ministry. I set up my ladder and then remembered that I needed to send the last \$1400 to Liberia to put the roof on Mercy's House. I pulled out my phone, opened the money transfer app, sent the money, put my phone back in my pocket and climbed to the very top of the ladder. I don't remember anything after that. I fell twenty feet and landed on concrete. Miraculously, there was a lady there who saw and called 911. EMS had me to Memorial Herman Hospital in the Woodlands in 11 minutes. With all of my injuries, the doctors told Lisa and my family that they needed to prepare themselves because they were going to do all they could but I was very hurt and very sick and they should gather the family. My face was shattered, over 100 fractures. I had 3 brain bleeds and a closed brain injury, 8 broken ribs, broken collar bones and sternum, busted shoulder, 3 broken vertebra, internal bleeding that eventually killed my spleen and part of a kidney and on and on... But God!!! My warrior princess wife, family and dozens of church, Tres Dias, and other brothers and sisters in Christ began flooding the hospital and prayers and messages began coming in from around the world. My son-in-law and daughter, Oscar and Brooke, flew in from Colombia, Mercy and her fiancée Bobby came down from Arlington. Basically, the army of God showed up and began to pray a hurricane of prayer around me and very quickly "the tide of the battle began to turn." I was unconscious, between life and death, in ICU for 25 days battling pneumonia, sepsis, urinary infection, blood infection, a hemothorax, a pneumothorax and more but God's army stayed with me and prayed continuously throughout those 25 days. So many people flooded the hospital every day that the doctors and nurses began to ask, "Who is this man?" Lisa posted prayers every day on facebook that electrified people around the world. The people of God began giving tens of thousands of dollars to take care of us. Miracles upon miracles!!!

Here are some of my sweet wife's many prayers that she prayed and started posting on Day 5...

*Day 5 - Abba please remember Matthew tonight. Touch him, heal him, and raise him up. Glorify yourself and amaze the doctors and nurses. There is A God who heals and still answers the prayers of His people! Thank you, Lord...*

*Day 6 - Good Morning Lord, will you help Matt? Help his body to heal, his mind to be stayed on you, and his lungs to be free of pneumonia. Please give his doctors wisdom, direction, and insight into all these injuries. Help our family to lean into you as we walk this path. Increase our faith and glorify yourself even in this.*

*Praying for Matt tonight as I fall into bed. Please pray with me. Pray for his lungs to be healed and free of pneumonia. Pray all his vitals will stabilize and for his total healing. Pray for the family's peace as we wait to see him, hug him, and be able to hear his voice once again...*

*Day 7 - Good morning Lord,*

*It's me again lifting up Matt. Praying he will pass the tests they are running today. Praying you will heal the pneumonia. I'm asking you to heal his body, quiet his mind, lift his spirits, and surround him with your presence. Lord we are here and trusting you with this mountain in front of us and the Sea on both sides of us with the army closing in. Help us Lord....*

*Even in this... "I will praise you in this storm"*

*Day 8 - Waiting for Matt to wake up and be able to remove the intubation tube...*

*Lord please heal Matt, surround him with your presence, rebuild everything that's been broken, and help him with his every need. Bring peace within the family, a trust that is unheard of, and increase our faith as we stand here waiting on you to heal Matt. We ask for your presence, your healing, your guidance, and your power to do what only you can do. Glorify yourself today, even in this...*

*Tonight, we are waiting for Matt to wake up... his next step is to remove the intubation. However, he's not responding today even though they have stopped the sedation. Please pray for him to start responding soon. Also, they have to remove the intubation on Monday they can't wait any longer. If he doesn't wake up they are talking tracheotomy. Pray no trach... for matt wake up and respond...*

*Day 9 - It's me, it's me, it's me oh Lord standing in the need of prayer...*

*I lift Matt up to you. I'm asking you to touch his body, rebuild all his bones, balance his metabolic system, and heal every sick organ to the smallest part in his body. Father let him glorify you even in this. Raise him up stronger than before and let him be the one you chose to go to the Nations and share what a wonderful God we serve!!! Let him shout your goodness from the mountain tops and through the valleys. Lord I ask a great harvest would be reaped in your name. Give his voice back to him so he can preach the good news once again mightier than before. Father, he's your man, your warrior, use him to bring many to you and to glorify you in all things....*

*When we win we praise you, and when we lose we praise you.... in all things we praise the Lord!!!*

*"For I will restore health to you, and your wounds I will heal, declares the Lord." Jeremiah 30:17*

*Day 10 - Lord, Matt is still in ICU fighting for his life. Will you help him Lord? Help him to wake up, help him to grow strong, help him to be better than he was before, help him to reach more people than he ever has for your glory, help him to heal wholly and completely, help us to glorify you even in this, Father. You can and I believe you will. Carry us Lord through this storm...*

*Thank you, Lord, for hearing us, please heal Matt...*

*So, we wait, pray, hope, and watch.... Lord please help us and bring Matt back to us... Thank you Lord for hearing us, please heal Matt..."*

*Day 11 - Good morning Lord,*

*It's me asking you to heal and help Matt. Thank you for lowering his fever, completely heal his lungs of the pneumonia, rebuild all the broken bones, balance his metabolic system, stop the bleeding and heal his brain, touch his organs and renew every cell. Help him to wake up and be strong enough to remove the intubation. Father please help him.*

*"I sought the Lord, and He answered me, and deliver me from all my fears." Psalm 34:4*

*Day 12 - Lord we need your help. Will you help Matt? Will you heal every part of his body that is sick? Will you rebuild every broken bone? Will you restore every organ? Will you make him stronger than he was before? Will you make all things new? Please reset and restart everything that's been shaken and shocked. Father, he's your warrior, please restore him and use him to reach more after this than he has reached before April 11th. Raise up your man and send him out with your message...*

*Father thank you for helping us through this crisis. Please let Matt wake up tomorrow and be able to remove the intubation. Thank you so much for all you've done so far and all your about to do. Help him, heal him, restore him, rebuild him, renew him, and revive him... in your perfect timing...*

*Day 13 - Good Morning Lord,  
Will today be the day you wake Matt up? Please help him, heal him, restore him, renew him, and rebuild everything that's broken....*

*Day 14 - Father let this be the day Matt breathes on his own. I pray his stats stay stable, give him the strength to work with the doctor to remove the intubation and give him peace through it all. Thank you, Lord, for helping us...*

*Day 15 - Good Morning Lord,  
Thank you so much for your goodness and grace towards us. Thank you for helping us through this crisis. I lift up Matt and ask you to help him. Help him with the swallow test today, help him begin to speak better, help him to remain calm and not to panic as his memories come back. Help him to continue to breathe and heal. Help him to rest and not fight against all the pain and discomfort he feels. Thank you, Father, for carrying us, helping us, providing our every need even before we ask, and thank you for loving us.*

*"I sought the Lord and He answered me and delivered me from all my fears." Psalms 34:4*

*Day 16 - Abba, I need you. Will you come and bring your presence into Matt's room? Will you touch his body and restore all broken bones? Will you heal all the damaged organs? Will you renew all the blood vessels and connective tissue? Will you repair his facial fractures? Will you hold his head and revive his mind? Thank you, Father, for hearing, answering, and being our ever-present help in time if need... "I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." Philippians 3:8*

*"Light is always costly and comes at the expense of that which produces it. An unlit candle does not shine, for burning must come before the light. And we can be of little use to others without a cost to ourselves. Burning suggests suffering, and we try to avoid pain. We tend to feel we are doing the greatest good in the world when we are strong and fit for active duty and when our hands are busy with kind acts of service. Therefore, when we are set aside to suffer, when we are sick, when we are consumed with pain, and when all our activities are stopped, we feel we are no longer of any use and are accomplishing nothing. Yet, if we will be patient and submissive, it is almost certain we will be a greater blessing to the world around us during our time of suffering and pain than we were when we thought we were doing our greatest work. Then we are burning, and shining brightly as a result of the fire. The glory of tomorrow is rooted in the drudgery of today. Many people want the glory without the cross, and the shining light without the burning fire, but crucifixion comes before coronation." - L. B. Cowman, Streams in the Desert*

*Day 17 - God will answer when to thee,  
Not a possibility of deliverance seems near;  
It is then He will appear.  
God will answer when you pray;  
Yea, though mountains block thy way,  
At His word, a way will be  
E'en through mountains, made for thee.  
God who still divides the seas,  
Willingly will work for thee;  
God, before whom mountains fall,  
Promises to hear thy call.*

*Day 18 - But Moses told the people, "Don't be afraid. Just stand still and watch the Lord rescue you today. The Egyptians you see today will never be seen again. The Lord himself will fight for you. Just stay calm." Exodus 14: 13-14*

*Lord I lift Matt up today as I seek the best medical help available for him. God you made him and know him. You formed him before I ever knew him. You are his creator, his God, his Father, his ever-present help in time of trouble. Father, we are in trouble and need your help today to slow down the process of them trying to discharge Matt before he's ready, to speed up the process in finding him a place for continued treatment as his brain heals, we need your favor in doctors, administrators, placement at the rehab, financial assistance and so much more. Father, please help me to focus and find the path your leading us on. I trust you Lord and believe you will heal Matt, you are giving him favor and you will restore him to the work you've given him to do. Father, please help us. I believe Lord, help my unbelief.... deliver me from my fears.*

*I just saw Matt. He is swallowing today!! Thank you, Lord! His voice is stronger! He is struggling for words... Pray his brain heals and he can find the words he's reaching for. Pray his esophagus and tongue to heal so he can manage swallowing and speaking better. They are going to try to get him up today and maybe do some walking to the chair and sit. When you sit it uses different muscles than laying. Please pray for him as he continues to heal and me as I begin to fight for his continued care. Lord, please sing over Matt tonight while I sleep, let him sleep peacefully....*

*Day 19 - It's me again Lord, asking you to help Matt. Will you come and meet him in the hospital room and touch his body? Heal his brain. Renew all the connections, give him strength to begin moving again, wake up his body, help him to fully come out of the sedation, fully detox all those medications, rebuild all the broken and fractured bones, revive all his vital organs to work at full capacity as you created them to work. Father, help us to find the perfect brain rehab center for Matt to move to as he needs more time to heal and retrain his mind to function again. As he learns to formulate words, his motor skills, and every beautiful way you made this body to work. Lord, glorify yourself in all of this. I have become overwhelmed with the hospital, the move, the decisions, and his great needs. I'm just me, very simple prayer cha and Matt's helpmeet all these years. Help me Lord to follow your lead, listen to your still small voice among all the noise, leaning into you, and make wise decisions for the family, his medical needs, and the ministry. Remember Matt's passion, help the kids, the pastors, and the nations he so dearly loves. Abba, we need your help. Please help us, help them and raise Matt up once again with a strong voice send him out on your mission to the nations!*

*Day 20 - Father give us favor...*

*Father, I need your help. Will you help me focus on one day at a time. Lord I need you to slow the hospital down on their hyper-discharge of this very sick & hurt man. Father fight for us! We need your guidance, your favor, your doorway, your blessing, your healing touch, your spoken word and it will come to pass. Speak Lord your favor with the doctors and hospital and healing into Matt. Hold him in your loving arms tonight as he sleeps and purify and restore every cell. Repair every bone, renew his spirit, reconstruct every organ, and cleanse every toxin from his body. Please help us Lord to have peace with the hospital and the staff. Help us find the right neural rehab for Matt. We need your favor....*

*Day 21 - Father, you know I don't like to fight. My words get lost and my tongue gets tied. I don't want to fight the hospital to keep Matt there as they are preparing to discharge him. I'm asking you to fight for us. Lord, give us favor with the doctors, give us favor with the nurses, let them stand with us. The doctors say these things just take time. Matt just needs time for his brain to heal. Please give him that time. Help us find a way. I just don't know if I can do this. Lord help me, if you are for us then who can be against us. I'm asking you to show yourself mighty on Matt's behalf. He's your son, he's your warrior, he's wounded, tired, broken, and struggling. Don't let the business side of this hospital put him out on the street with no place to go, no place to recover with these very serious injuries. Father, I'm asking you to be our protection. To be the God I know you are... show up for us today...*

*Day 22 - Good Morning Lord,*

*Thank you for the rest, peace and hope you poured out on me last night. Thank you for carrying us "Thus far" . Thank you for being El Roi, seeing me, seeing Matt, seeing our family and friends and walking through this with us. Father, see us, be our guide, help us, have mercy on us. We are weak and are not prepared to handle all of this and I am thankful I don't have to. Father, I ask your presence to be upon Matt today. I pray your presence would be upon my family today, our friends, and the hospital. That you would glorify yourself even in these dire circumstances. Give us wisdom to make the decisions that have to be made. Give us favor with the doctors, the insurance company, the rehabs, and all things connected to Matt's situation. Father, let all the medical bills be paid, let all our needs be supplied the royal way that you do things, give us hope if there is hope, and give us peace in trusting you as Matt would have. Trusting you will open the doors we need, you will guide our steps, and you will be our God, guide, comforter, our resource, and our hope. You take from the rich and give to the poor. Please help us have access to that policy to cover Matt if it be your will and you would be glorified. If not, we trust You alone. Thank you, Father, for holding Matt and for carrying him through this.*

*Day 23 - Father give us favor today as the insurance adjuster reviews Matt's case. Let your kindness pour out as Stacy from Touch Stone evaluates him. Abba, I ask you to hold Matt and carry him through this storm and place him exactly where he needs to be for his best care. Lord give him strength to heal, give him the right place to heal, give him the provisions to cover all he needs to heal and for the family. Lord glorify yourself even in this! Show yourself mighty! Close the mouths of the nay sayers and use your mighty warrior once again to slay the dragons in the kingdom, to visit the orphans, to help the poor and needy, to be a tower to those lives he touches. And Lord thank you for helping me rest and giving me peace. I love you Lord, thank you for loving us more than we know.... Lord remember Matt...*

*Day 24 - Lord God, I need your help today to face the battle of the hospital, property insurance, liability, social security, Medicaid, bills, placement of Matt in Neural/brain rehab, all while he is fighting infections, learning to swallow again, proper nutrition, his auto-immune issues, angry spleen, and so many more things weighing on my shoulders and mind. Lord help me hear your voice among the noise, help me to follow you and your path not to worry about what they seem to be screaming at me, Majesty have mercy on my soul and Matt as he's lays another day in the hospital bed wanting to go home not knowing what's happened. Help me Abba to seek you first and early so I can hear your voice, your music, and feel your presences all day. I need help I can't fight this battle alone. The battle for Matt's recovery. Knowing what he needs most and acquiring it seems too much for me. But if you will do it Lord it will happen. If you are for me they cannot be against me. Will you come and go with me into this fight and win for Matt. I know you can, I'm asking you to grant us the insurance we need. To provide for the best rehab for him. Restore your warrior Lord. What man says is impossible is possible with you!! Let it be done, Let it be remembered for your glory!!! And our great joy!!*

On the night of May 3, 2017, the hospital told Lisa, "Please just put him in hospice and let him go. We have seen the brain scans. He will never wake up and even if he does, he will be the drooling guy in the corner the rest of his life." Rebekah sat next to my bed, praying, all night. Lisa went home cleaned up and was in her prayer closet praying that God would wake me up when suddenly her phone rang and it was our pastor. He had been supporting and encouraging my family through the whole disaster and he called to get the latest. Lisa told him about hospice and then said, "Pastor, if he would just wake up everything would change!" He said, "Well, we've seen God do many things in his favor already. Let's pray he wakes up." They prayed.



Lisa drove to the hospital, walked into my room, and I opened my eyes and said, "Hello beautiful!" With a very large smile, she said, "There you are!" I said, "Yes, why am I tied to this bed and where am I? Why is it so dark in here?" It turns out that both of my optic nerves were badly damaged. I'm blind in one eye and nearly blind in the other, but I can still see out of one eye just enough to read sermon notes. BUT GOD!!! Miracle!!!!!!

My doctor's and surgeons rushed to see me and exclaimed, "Holy \_\_\_\_\_! You're a MIRACLE! Oops, excuse our language!" We all laughed.

I was so happy to see my family and hear the amazing stories of all God had done to rescue me that I was laughing and crying at the same time. The doctors asked my wife. Is this normal? I that the real him? She chuckled and said, "Matt crying and laughing at the same time? Yep, that's the real him."

Here is more from Lisa,

*Day 25 –*



..... Matt woke up today!!.... ----- Matt is up and awake today. Eating and following commands. Talking, and his memory is coming back. praising the Lord!! Thank you, Lord,! You are an AMAZING GOD!! I am in AWE of you and your loving kindness toward us! You truly have shown up and restored your warrior. He's been telling those amazing war stories all day long... Abba, my heart is gushing with gratitude that you did hear and answer my every cry... Praising you, thanking you, admiring you, adoring my King, I stand in awe of my Beloved, you are truly Amazing!

Oh Lord, my God! Thank you for wrapping me up with your loving kindness. Thank you, Father, for hearing and answering my prayer. I am in awe of every detail of my hearts cry you provided so wonderfully. Father doubly bless all your children and people who have been for us. Pour out on everyone who have helped and are helping Matt. You know I cannot thank them enough or ever repay their kindness but you can, will you? Doubly bless them for us Lord. Thank you for showing yourself mighty!! Please cover Matt with your presence, calm his fears, continue to heal him, touch his eyes so he can see clearly once again, Amaze the doctors even in this... Father I thank you for his life, let it glorify you! Help me have wisdom today, show us the path we should follow to continue his care, and provide our every need as it arises. Thank you, Abba, for loving us, caring for us, and providing our needs.

Father, thank you for a beautiful day with my beloved. You have totally amazed me with your kindness and love toward us. Lord I trust you for the provision for Matt's recovery. I know he has to leave here soon. I trust you with the details. Father, remember his eyes, his bladder, his lungs, his back pain. Help him Lord to completely heal and fully recover. Provide every need....

Day 26 - Abba, thank you for all your goodness and grace. I am so in Awe of you! You have done great things and have worked a mighty miracle on the behalf of your people! Thank you for saving Matt and for waking him up. I pray he would grow stronger, that all his bones would heal, that his spirit would stay encouraged even with the pain. Help him Lord in every detail that his body needs help in. Touch his eyes and make them see again, completely heal his lungs, continue to heal his brain and rebuild all those connections. Thank you, Father, for all you doing and have done.

Lord help us find a way to pay for Matts rehab, you know we need \$40,000 which is nothing to you but it's a lot to me. Father give us favor with the insurance or please provide this for Matt to help him fully recover. Lord you said you take from the rich and give to the poor. This insurance company is rich and we are not according to man's wisdom. Father please move on our behalf and grant us a way to pay for rehab for Matt. Thank you Lord for hearing me, for you always hear me...

Day 27 - I praise you today!!! You are an Awesome God, a Mighty Warrior, a Loving Father, a Kind Abba, a Gracious Lord, a Beautiful Beloved, and my Great King! Thank you just isn't enough for all the prayers you have answered, all the requests you have granted, all the details you have provided, everything you have done for me, Matt, and our family. I am amazed at what you've done so far and what your about to do. Father it's me asking once again for you to help us. Lord I need you to show me the path to Matt's best recovery. Let the insurance cover his rehab, or provide the cash, or show me what you have in mind for this. Make it perfectly clear how we move through this next step. Please heal Matt's eyes, his bladder, his colon... all these new issues. Father, I love you and praise you for all you have done. You are Amazing!!

“Once Matt woke up, he needed to go to a rehabilitation hospital. It cost \$2500 a day. I quickly figured out we needed \$40,000 within two days. Within two hours of praying about it I received a

message that said "God owns the cattle on a thousand hills and He's selling" Your check will arrive soon. Amazing... Miracles day after day!"

Father, I stand in awe of you! You have truly amazed me every step of this journey! Thank you, Father, for carrying me through this storm. When the wind and waves raised their ugly heads, you were there holding my hand. When Doctors thought it was impossible, you made it possible. What the hospital administration said couldn't be done, you showed up and did it right before their very eyes! When I was over-whelmed you calmed my fears. When I was exhausted you carried me. When I thought my head would burst running in so many directions, you gave me peace. You have been here with me. Always bringing a calm, a peace, and a hope that just goes against the storm in front of me. Thank you, Lord, for your presence, your provision, your people, your kindness, your mercy, and unending grace! I love you, Abba. Please remember Matt, fully restore him. For your glory and our great joy!!!

Day 28 - It's me Lord. Still in awe of you and your awesomeness. As I woke up this morning my heart was amazed at your kindness. As I watched Matt begin a more intense physical training I smiled thinking how far he has come from that night the doctor didn't give us much hope. I watched the doctor interact with Matt today and he was in awe, he sat down and listened to Matt's stories and just couldn't believe it... but he doesn't know you or your greatness. He hasn't heard or understand yet But God...

Day 29 - Thank you for being there for us. Thank you for hearing and answering every prayer, every hope, every need, and even every want. You are so loving you amaze me. Father, please heal Matt's eyes. Restore the one they say is dead and heal the other one. Help him to see well again. Deliver him from all his fear as you have mine. Please restore his bladder, fix his colon, and repair his arm. Help him to continue to grow stronger every day Lord. Father thank you for hearing me, helping, me, showing me your loving-kindness through your people, increasing my faith, and for showing off for your people and for glorifying yourself in this and giving us all joy in this amazing story about our amazing God!!  
I love you Abba, goodnight...

Day 30 - Father, please help Matt sleep tonight, restore his bodies strength, help him not to be afraid of falling since he cannot see very well it's difficult for him to be weak and almost blind. Lord, place your hands around him and heal his body, remake his eyes, rebuild his bones, heal his left arm structurally and muscularly, purify his blood infection, clear up the UTI, restore his bladder function, strengthen his legs, repair his colon, cover him with Your presence, and help to lean into you as you breathe life back into his broken and damaged body. Father, please help him grow stronger in body and spirit. Abba, I'm asking for you to move through his body and restore every damaged part, rebuild every broken part, and to heal him fully and completely. Thank you for what you've done and for what your about to do. I know you love him more than I can ever imagine. It's so hard for me to see him in pain and to watch him struggle. Lord I'm asking you for help, for guidance, for peace in this storm. Help me to trust you and to reach upward for the new normal you have for us and to glorify you even in this... draw me closer to you Lord as the winds blow and the storm rages. Thank you, Lord, for hearing me and helping me...

Day 31 - Father thank you so much for your loving kindness. For your wonderful grace! For hearing and answering our prayers! For being a loving Father! I admirer your holiness and stand in awe before you that you could love people such as us. You are truly Amazing. Abba thank you for giving Matt rest last night and comfort. Thank you for renewing his spirit this morning. Please,

*rebuild his skeletal system, renew his circulatory system, open his eyes to see clearly, purify his urinary track system, heal all his organs, help his mind to stay focused on you Lord... how wonderful you are, how marvelous your works, how beautifully you love us, let him have peace to know you have us safe right in your hands, let his tempter go back where he belongs, Father let your presence surround your warrior, repair him, help him, fight for him, anoint him with your cleansing oil and fill him with Your Spirit, use him even in this Lord to close the mouths of his enemies and glorify you Lord! Let your praise ring through the nations for all you are doing and have done!! I ask you Lord to raise up your warrior once again and close the mouth of enemies for your glory and our great joy!*

*Day 32 - "For nothing will be impossible with God..."  
Luke 1:37*

*Abba, thank you so much for all you have done to heal Matt. I pray you would continue to strengthen him. Please restore his sight, rebuild his bones, free him from infection and disorders, repair every cell in his brain and throughout his body that has been damaged... Father glorify yourself in this rehabilitation center. Bring peace to Matt, calm his worries, restore his hopes and dreams, use him mightily for your kingdom! Let him rest tonight, give him your vision for his new normal, open up the path we are to follow, and fill us with your presence as we move forward into what you have for us next... I love you Abba and thank you for letting me rest in your lap through this storm. Thank you for rescuing Matt and restoring him to our family.*

*Day 33 - "Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him for the help of His presence." Psalm 52:5  
Thank you, my Precious Father, for helping me in my distress. Thank you for coming and carrying me in this storm. Thank you for proving my every need. Thank you, Lord, for giving me my husband back. For hearing my hearts cry and answering the desire of my heart and so much more. I love you Abba. I praise you. You have given me such delight. I just want to thank you for remembering Matt. For healing Matt. For holding him throughout this storm. Father, please remember his eyes. Return his sight to him Lord. Cleanse all the toxins out of his body, heal every tissue, every organ, message his brain and heal every part. Lord help him to rest, give him strength to participate in his PT, help him to relearn to process all the functions necessary in his speech therapy, help him to remember all the messages you gave him and Your word that he had memorized. Father I thank you for all that you've done thus far in Matt. Prepare him now to again be your warrior. He is your man and always will be. Calm his worries, blow a tranquil spirit over him, speak to his heart as he rests and awaken him tomorrow ready to worship you. I praise you a Lord and thank you so very much for being such a mighty God!! I'm in Awe of You!!!*

*Day 34 - "We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. May your unfailing love rest upon us, O Lord, even as we put our hope in you." Psalm 33:20-22*

*Lord God, the maker of everything! I praise you for who you are and all that you have done! You are an awesome, mighty God that created everything, is over everything, and with all your mighty acts has proven you are the mightiest, the greatest, the strongest, most powerful, and yet you've chosen to love the weakest, loneliest such as us. Father, I thank you for your loving kindness over me and my family, I thank you for all you've done for Matt. I praise you for hearing and answering our prayers. I pray you would remember his eyes, remember all the connections and operations of his brain, I ask that you touch him and fully heal him from the smallest seemingly useless cell throughout his body through all his vital organs and into and through his brain. I pray all his bones*

would be rebuilt, all of his organs would work better than before, his immune system would reset and work properly once again, I ask that you would heal every cell, every blood vessel, heal his metabolic system, his vascular system, remember his memories, his stories, his sermons, his teaching that you gave him, his love for music, his love for your Word Father. Help him not forget Lord but to remember not only what he once knew but also all the new things your teaching him through this. Raise him up Lord and use him in power once again to share how good you are, you've always been and will be... help him once again to share grace in all it's beauty to the one who thinks it's too late, and the one who thinks they don't need it... Father, help us to move forward with your favor in your time

Day 35 - "Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer." Romans 12:12

As I sit here in our Rehab hospital room listening to Matt sleep, yes he is snoring, I'm looking at my green ...But God... bracelet thinking of all the miraculous things God has done for us over the past five weeks. Yes, I've been living out of a suit case in a hospital for five weeks cause home is where my life-time mate is and he's here so I'm here too.

First, they said he wouldn't make it through that first heart wrenching, terrible night... But he did!

Next, they said he'd need facial surgery... But he didn't!

Then they said he'd need brain surgery... But he didn't.

Then he fought not one but two infections which stressed his already broken body... again he may not make it... But he did!

Then the morning came they thought he was brain dead... But he wasn't!

Then they were sure he would have to have a trek and a pic to talk with... But he didn't!

Then two more infections set in and they didn't think he'd pull through... But he did!

Then they said he may never wake up... But he did!

They said he'd never be accepted into Rehab... But he's here!!

Then they said his bladder may never work again... But it does!!

Then we find out his colon has been hurt and isn't working either and may not... But it does!

Then they said they didn't think he'd ever come back... But he is!! Day by Day, moment by moment...

...But God... things would be so different!

Thank you all so very much for fighting this fight with us! You've prayed with us, you've prayed for us, you've cried with us, you've laughed with us, you've held us, you've fed us, you've come, you've given, you've helped supply every need, you've listened, you've encouraged, you've been the body of Christ to me and our family through this horrible storm and we are better for it! Thank you for showing us Christ in so many beautiful ways!! We love you so much!!

Day 37 - Father, please heal Matt. Help him with these horrible headaches, nightmares, medication reactions, and such that he is struggling with. I hate seeing him in pain, Lord. Help me Father to help him, to comfort him, to ease his pain Lord. Abba, please heal him, strengthen him, and raise him up. I ask especially for his eyes and brain, the injuries that are still healing, that you would fully and completely repair, restore, and rebuild everything that's been damaged and broken. Thank you, Lord, for helping me through all of this...

Day 39 - "Invite me into those broken places, and cooperate with Me in putting the fragments back together in new ways."

Had a long day working on putting those fragments back together...

*It's me again Lord looking for you in the Hard Places... remember Matt, remember Mission Critical, remember Colombia, remember Rwanda, remember Liberia, remember Pakistan, remember the children, remember your people who are crying out to you all over the globe, help them Lord, help me Lord to take the next right step...*

*Day 40 - Thank you Lord I'm not alone....*

*Waiting with hope is very difficult, but true patience is expressed when we must even wait for hope. I will have reached the point of greatest strength once I have learned to wait for hope.  
George Matheson*

*Father God, my heart cries out to you tonight. I am in awe of what you're doing, what you've done, and for what your about to do. Thank you, Lord, for ... Is everything the right word? You have showed up, showed off, and been so wonderful! I just don't know how to communicate how full my heart is... yet I'm tempted to be afraid, to stress, to allow my heart to worry as we approach the next step in Matt's recovery. I'm praising you on one hand that he's coming home and on the other it becomes over-whelming how far we still have to go. Forgive me Father for trying to sort all this out myself. Matt's bladder-neck inflammation, his auto-immune problems, his left shoulder, his left hip joint, his eyes, his cognitive abilities, his word finding, his spirit as he cried out to you to help him get back to where he once was, it is such a high mountain, a fierce giant, it seems too hard...*

*You have done so much so far, am I asking for too much? Should I settle and throw in the towel... then I remember that verse, the one you gave me so long ago... I am the God of all, the maker of heavens and earth, Is there anything too hard for me? You asked that question... I love that you are the God who loves to be put to the test... who loves to show off for His children. Abba, will you help me? Will you heal Matt? Will you resolve this insurance case? Will you continue to provide our every need for our home? Matt's health care? Mission Critical? The pastors? Their families? The missionaries? Their families? The children? The schools? Colombia? Liberia? Rwanda? And the other 18 countries who are waiting for Matt to come, to teach, to train, to serve, to preach... Lord hear your children they are crying out to you, please answer their prayers, provide their needs, help us to help them. Father, these are your children and I know you're a good Father... show up for them above and beyond! Lord, show up for Matt over the top! Glorify yourself here in this hospital to these doctors and nurses. Lord to all your kids who know him and are wondering if you will. Increase their faith and be their God, show them who you are. Be mighty and overcome our enemies. Father calm my heart as I sit in your arms and trust in you. I know you are good and are delivering me from all my fears day by day. Thank you, Abba... thank you for being the God who with a mighty voice says No, There is Nothing too hard for Me!! ... I will take a deep breath and wait, and watch, and hope, and wonder, and stand in Awe of You! My Abba, My God*

*Day 41 - "But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me." Micah 7:7*

*Day 43 - Father I want to praise you as I fall into bed with my head spinning in so many directions with so many decisions, calls, appointments, and things to do. This world is screaming for my attention and so many of them are viable but God... I need more of you. I am desperate for your presence, your guidance, your peace in this chaos, time with you... Father I miss my prayer closet, I miss the worship, the quiet, your Word, crawling up into your lap and sharing my heart with you in the wee hours of the morning... the days and nights have run together, it's always noisy, I only*

*get a few hours here and there to sleep, make calls, eat, the up and down, running here and there.., yes, I cry out to you for help, but I miss the quiet of our time together... I know this is only transition and I will have a prayer closet once again instead of all this chaos... Father help me to focus on you. Help me to raise above the noise, help me to hear your still small voice in-spite of the alarms, beeps, and voices. Will you meet me here? Right here in this cold hospital room? Help me to process all the information thrown at me and hear your direction...*

*Father, I want to thank you for touching Matt and waking him up. Thank you, Lord, for hearing my heart cry so deep within me and delivering from my fears. For giving him back to us. Your mercy is awesome, your compassion is so wonderful. You are so amazing helping me step by step. Thank you for bringing us to this very cold hospital and allowing Matt to learn to walk again! He did so good today before he crashed. He worked hard, he has grown so strong in such a short time... help him recover from working hard today. Please give him sweet rest. Abba please let his bladder neck start working, help his body heal better than it was before, please heal his left arm, repair every nerve ending, every muscle, remember his left hip joint, repair all the connective tissue, Father please reconstruct his brain. Reconnect all those parts and repair all the damage. Help him Father as he struggles with words to find the new paths being remade to those files. And I ask for his eyes to open and clearly see the light of day once again. Let him glorify you as he sees the sun set and the moon appear. Let him be amazed by another sun raise. Lord, you fashioned him once, please do it again. And help me Lord to draw my strength from you to encourage him, to find the right attorney, to deal with hospitals, to learn all his therapy, to be his helper, to move, to answer the calls, to keep up with everything in Matts place for now as we learn, grow, and adjust to the new normal that you have for us. Help me to remember this is your story not mine, he is your son and you will raise him up in your time, and you are a good Father!! Please Lord show yourself mighty in all of this!! For your glory and our great joy!!!*

*It's me again Lord, I pray you would relieve Matt's headache, please help his bladder-neck to relax and work properly, heal the nerve bundle under his left arm, repair his left leg joint, relieve him of these nightmares and restore his whole body to good health...  
Raise up your warrior once again Lord... Bring peace to his body right now and allow him to sleep... wake him up with all his bodily functions working in beautiful order as you made them to... please Lord remember his eyes... thank you Lord for hearing me... helping me... and restoring Matt to full health*

*Day 44 - Good morning Lord. I exalt you Lord. You are an awesome God. A beautiful Savior. A beloved Father. A generous Provider. A compassionate Comforter. A mighty Warrior. My ever-present help in time of need. Lord, I need you today. Thank you so very much for generously providing for us! For taking care of our every need. I know you will continue to make a way to pay every doctor, to pay the hospitals, to pay every bill that comes up, and you will help us to keep helping those precious children in Rwanda, in Liberia, in Colombia, and all the other countries that are crying out in need. Lord, remember the children, the pastors, every missionary, all the churches, and projects... remember your people, they are hungry to see you, to see your power, to hear from heaven, to know you, to follow you Lord... remember those who have never heard the gospel once... wake us up Lord who have so much to those who have so little. Help us Father to know you, to know your heart and to have the courage to follow you to the nations... to every people group starting with but not limited to our neighbors. Lord help me to share Jesus with these doctors, nurses, patients, and visitors even in this crisis. Help me to love them, touch them, and point them to you as we walk this path of recovery. Let me share how good you are and glorify yourself by doing what the doctors can't in healing Matt fully, wholly, and completely throughout*



*every cell in his broken and disheveled body. Bring everything back into order as you created it to work and use him mightily throughout the nations to share the joy of following you. Let us spread the joy of your salvation, the joy of this recovery, the joy of serving a great and powerful God. Lord we love you, we thank you, we praise you, and our hope is in you...*

*Lord please give us favor as we meet with the attorneys tomorrow. Help me to hear you, give me wisdom to make godly decisions, and us find a solution to this situation that would glorify you. Our greatest joy is to know you and follow you Lord. Show me the path I need to follow even in this..*

*Day 46 - Good morning Lord*

*Father, what can be said in this one word? Father, wow! You have amazed me! Father, without you none of this could be possible! How very different things would be without my kind, loving, compassionate, all powerful, all knowing, grace filled, merciful Abba. You have gone above and beyond. Thank you!*

*Today, I find you in my new prayer room. Today, Matt gets to come home!! Today, we begin our new normal! And it's only because of you and your loving-kindness. I knew you could but I just didn't know how wonderfully amazing you would show up and show off. Your children came and helped us!! Thank you, Father. Please doubly bless them for all they have done "Thus Far". Thank you, Lord, for delivering me from all my fears. Thank you for carrying me and thank you for allowing me to finally take that deep breath this morning right here, as I praise you, as I cry out to you, as you calm my every storm... my heart is full of praise and thankfulness. Lord, please bless my friends, my family, the hospital, all the nurses, and doctors that have helped us and have been so kind to Matt. Lord give us favor with Matt's disability in the Social Security Office, give us favor with the attorneys and legal stuff, Lord help us to live with joy every day in our new normal, help us to embrace the future with hope and expectation, looking for you in all of this... Lord help us to always praise you and glorify you in all things and remember what you have done and what you are doing. Father, provide our every need as we walk day by day enjoying the joy of your presence! Thank you that today starts phase four in Matt's recovery... help him Lord, give him strength, repair his mind, heal his body, and guide his future...I am in awe of you*

*Day 47 - Today Matt is coming home!! Can you believe he will walk out to the car and get in and walk into our new home!!! Praising him!!! Phase four will begin a six to twelve-month outpatient rehabilitation process, maybe more. Which is very expensive, but worth every penny. Then phase five may continue an in-home rehabilitation to continue working on his executive process and language center of his brain. Thank you so much for praying, helping, and giving. We could have never come this far without all the help, provision, love, and compassion we've been given*

*Wow!! It's so nice to be home!! Matt slept 11 hours last night with no nightmares! Thank you Lord for all your mercy! We woke up praising God for Rachel's cabin! It is so quiet, tucked away in the trees, with such a beautiful woodsy warm environment. We slept with such peace and woke up very refreshed!*

*Tuesday will begin the long phase four recovery! Praise God we have come this far!*

*We are praising God for all that He has done for us and for Matt!! He is so much better but it will be a long time before he is reaching his new base line. Maybe 18 months to two years. He has a long-projected recovery ahead of him. We rejoice in every bit of hope that we see because the is progress and hope every day for a possible full recovery which the doctors have all deemed impossible.*

*But God....*

*Day 49 - Thank you Lord! I am Amazed by you...*

*Help us to rest and trust in you as we start our new normal tomorrow. Give me wisdom as we begin our new schedule of physical training, occupational training, and speech therapy. Help me Lord to know what is helpful, what is just busy work and how to best help Matt. Father, he is your man, your warrior, and you made me to be his helper. Lord I need your wisdom as we begin this new path of continued recovery at home and out patient therapy. Abba give me the strength to face each day with grace and the ability to wear these new hats you have placed before me. To be all the things Matt will need is overwhelming at times but my joy, to see him, listen to all his stories, be here with him amazes me to just be together and know what you did. Thank you Father for what you have done and what your about to do with your warrior... help me Lord to rest in your presence and watch you be Awesome!*

*Day 51 - God, you never cease to Amaze me. I stand in awe of you. Your words brought everything into order. Your character brought us love and redemption. Your ideas brought everything we know about. You are the essence of loving-kindness. We love because you loved, we are because you created, we can because of your enablement, what do we have that you didn't give us, what can we do without you, where would we be if it wasn't for you... Father, thank you. Thank you for your goodness, thank you for Christ, thank you for grace that doesn't end, thank you for the mercy you poured out on us today, thank you for just being the marvelous God you are, and the wonderful Father I have come to know and love so very much! Father, thank you for Matt's first day of outpatient therapy. Thank you for letting him ACE his speech evaluation after four days off with just rest and visitors. Wow, I thought he was getting behind and you amazed me and his therapist with his progress. She doesn't know how to help him.*

*Thank you, Abba...,*

*Thank you for providing us a beautiful house, thank you for friends, thank you for the rich love you have poured out on us, Lord thank you for Matt. Thank you for bringing him back, waking him up, healing him, for restoring him, for helping us... Lord amaze him and heal his eyes, restore all his abilities that have been injured, help him Father to rest in you as you hold him and repair every part. Lord please give us favor as we work on all this paper work and file for his social security benefits. Please let every part be reviewed, accepted and granted. Let it pay all the medical bills, future visits, honor yourself in this. They know Matt's a missionary and you know how he was treated. God glorify yourself in providing every need, paying every bill, and giving Matt his disability income. Rain down your blessings as he heals. Help him begin reading and writing once again. Thank you, Lord, for helping me as I walk through this, thank you for being with me, for carrying me, for giving me very real help in and throughout this terrible storm. Thank you for your goodness in showing up all along the way to hear and answer our cries for help. Please help us in this too.... all this government stuff. Thank you for hearing, providing and answering! Help me to know how to help Matt as we continue to go to therapy, do our homework, rest, receive visitors, prepare meals, all of life... Father Please help me to follow you and make the right decisions. Help me to know what is right for Matt and what isn't. Thank you, Lord, for hearing, understanding and for leading me. Please bless our friends and every person who has helped us... send a double blessing to them. For your glory and our great joy!!*

After 17 days in the rehab hospital, I walked out and went home. Praise Jesus! 3 weeks later I wrote this poem for Lisa...

## The Redhead

I was a teenage preacher from the Rocky Mountainside  
In a 3-piece western suit and cowboy boots that shined

As I sat in Bible college chapel in my second-row seat  
I noticed a pretty redhead in the choir smiling at me sweet

One day I took a chance and gave a nervous wink  
Her blushing smile in return made me really think

She was so shy she looked at the ground the first time I shook her hand  
We shared our testimonies, our stories, and our dreams oh so grand

The redhead had my heart from that very first night  
Our wedding the next summer is still my greatest delight

I preached far and wide and she always prayed  
God reclaimed thousands who all their lives had strayed

God gave us five beautiful babies in our first seven years  
My heart was filled with crazy love, my eyes with joyful tears

Best wife and mother in the world yes, the title is hers  
We raised them and then four others to be mighty kingdom warriors

Year after year I preached and the redhead interceded  
The blessed Spirit moved and thousands quickly heeded

She had our backs, we never had to fear  
We spread Him among the nations year after year

She made our family an army of shield maidens and mighty men  
His joy coursed through us and the glory rose to Him

This April the 11th I was suddenly struck to the ground  
Death loomed ever closer; my clock was ticking down

The redhead led the charge, the warriors stormed the gates of glory  
Our pastor, brothers and sisters joined in when they heard the awful story

A hurricane of global prayers roared into the sky  
Our loving savior heard them and refused to let me die

I awoke on May the 4th and grow stronger every day  
The redhead has cared for me so tenderly there are no words to say

She's been my love, my partner in battle, my delight and greatest friend  
We have many kingdom adventures ahead and I'll adore her to the end

Matt Bullen  
June 29, 2017

From the moment I woke up in the ICU on that May 4th Day, I had heard stories from my wife and daughter, Rebekah, about the girl, Renea, who worked in the building adjacent to the one I was inspecting, realized she didn't see me up on the ladder anymore, came over, and found me in a pool of my own blood. She called 911 and saved my life. Later she and her mother came to the hospital while I was in the coma. She cried and cried. She had gone to our website and seen all that God had been doing through us around the world and she just couldn't understand why something like this would happen to a man like me. Lisa was blessed to share the gospel with her and encourage her that God had this. I kept hearing stories about Renea and though I hadn't met her my heart was filled with love and gratitude that she had saved my life. I didn't know if I would ever get to meet her and thank her.

I quickly improved so much that I was able to preach at my home church, Celebration Church of The Woodlands, on August 9, 2017 just 120 days to the day from my fall and people all over the world watched the sermon online. (<https://subspla.sh/38dv5vh>) While I was standing on the front row waiting to be called up to preach, the music minister said, "Hey everyone, some of the friendliest people in the state of Texas are standing around you. Reach out and say hi while we play through this worship song." I turned to a young woman standing behind me to shake her hand and she said, "Hi Matt, I am Renea." I threw my arms around her, and she burst into sobs. I just said repeatedly as we hugged, "Thank you for saving my life." It was one of the sweetest moments of my life. Renea was one of the first people forward when I gave the invitation after my sermon that night and I was blessed to pray over her. On the first anniversary of my fall, I was preaching in Nepal 12 time zones away. When I got back to the hotel and checked my Facebook, Renea had written on my wall, "Thinking about you more today, though I think about you every day. You always thank me for saving your life but the truth is, you saved my life in ways you will never know." Miracle of God! Each anniversary of the fall I write to Renea and thank her again and on the second anniversary Lisa and I took her to dinner and had a wonderful time. We serve such a loving God and He is so good to put sweet people in our lives. Praise His name.

## **27: When It Rains, It Pours... BUT GOD! -**

***“Saturate me with the oil of Thy Spirit, that I may be aflame.  
Make me Thy fuel O flame of God.” – Jim Elliot***

On August 17, 2017, three months to the day after I came home from the hospital, Hurricane Harvey pounded Houston causing our kids to come to our rescue and evacuate us to Willis, north of The Woodlands. That night, our house flooded with 5 feet of water and everything we owned in this world except a bag of clothes, a phone, and a laptop for each of us was destroyed. BUT GOD!

Here is more from Lisa,

*“Three months to the day after Matt got out of rehab, Hurricane Harvey hit. Four to six feet of water burst through our beautiful home and everything was gone. Thirty-two years of memories gone. Again, the Christian community rose up and supplied every need. We had no income for 10 months but didn’t lack for anything. All our bills were paid month after month, doctor visits, medication, therapy, everything was covered. We would go to the mailbox and the money we needed was there. After the flood, again the Christian community rose up and every need was taken care of. I would receive a text to pick up an order at Wal-Mart, gift cards came, and so much more... We were displaced from our home for just over fourteen months and the community took care of us while we took care of Matt. I never had to worry about anything.*



Rebekah shared this sweet thought,

*Five months after my dad’s accident, on August 27th, five to six feet of water flooded our rent house that we had only lived in for three months. We lost most everything we owned. Standing in what used to be our beautiful home, but was now a muddy, slimy, stinky, disaster zone, I couldn’t stop staring. My brother kept asking me what to do first but I just couldn’t move. Then one of the sweetest ladies I know touched my arm and asked if she could take charge. I nodded and before I knew it over 25 people had showed up and cleaned out our entire house within two days.*

*We are to be Christ’s hands and feet in action to a hurting world and I believe the city of Houston and the State of Texas, showed the world what this looks like in the tragedy of Hurricane Harvey.*

*“When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you.” Isaiah 43:2-3 I have held onto this promise through our storm.*

For 10 months, we slept on an air mattress at Luke and Misti’s house, part of the time with 5 adults and 5 grandkids, 7-years-old and under, living in a one-bath house and yet we had the time of our lives. Eventually, the Christian community repaired a second bathroom and restored it to service. Every morning when I stumbled out of the bedroom, Joy, Joseph, Jacob, Arianna, Aerowyn, and Lily would come running shouting Papi! Papi! Many hugs and kisses later, they would ask, “Are we going to color today?” “Of course!” I would reply. Out came the coloring books, markers, and crayons. We will have those sweet memories forever. Some days, I would just sit in the yard and their Great Dane, Zara, would come and lay her giant head on my lap. Sweet times.

Shortly after I came home from the hospital, I received a confirmation email that I would speak at an upcoming men’s Tres Dias in three months. My wife called the leader, Mark, to gently explain that there was absolutely no way I could physically fulfill that commitment. But he would not take no for an answer. She tried to explain the enormous hurdles it would require for me to just be able to stand and preach, given my injuries. Mark was so sure that God wanted me on his weekend that he and his wife were rising at 5:00 a.m. every morning to pray for me. He told her that if I couldn’t come, he would place a chair with my name on it, representing me being there in spirit, but he was not giving up on the miracle. I improved so rapidly that we finally agreed that I would be there and preach. My son, Luke, committed to being by my side the entire weekend. A few days after the flood, Mark called to ask if I needed anything. I told him that all of my clothes went down in the flood but other than that, I was ok. He called back a few minutes later and told me that he and some of the Tres Dias brothers had set up an account for me at a local suit store and for me to go pick out “the best suit in the place” their treat. But God! I picked out a beautiful black Italian 3-piece suit, shirt, tie, and shoes and I have been blessed since to preach in that suit on four continents. But I’m getting ahead of myself again. I was blessed to preach at that weekend and it was one of the most miraculous of my life.

Shortly after, I was blessed to preach at the second anniversary service of my daughter Mercy’s African church in Fort Worth and she gave me perhaps the sweetest introduction I have ever been blessed with.

See Mercy’s sermon introduction here... (<https://vimeo.com/249236710>)

Then... warfare disaster again...

Our son, Levi, had begun to spiral back into his schizophrenic delusions just before my fall and then spiraled more rapidly after. He and his two little girls had been living with us for a couple of years. Shortly, after the flood he lost touch with reality and became dangerous. Texas Child Protective Services became involved when he threatened to kill his children and then himself. Levi was forced to move out and seek professional help for the protection of all the children in the home. His girls were left in our care by CPS. Weeks later, Levi, his estranged wife, and her lesbian lover showed up with 3 police cars accusing us of kidnapping the girls and we were forced to let them go. As I knelt on the carpet and hugged my two granddaughters age 3 and 5 goodbye, I said, “I won’t see you again for a long time but I want you to know that Papi loves you.” The 5-year-old granddaughter, Arianna, squeezed me and said, “I know Papi, I love you too and every night at bedtime I will pray for you.” My heart was broken but it also swelled with love and the knowledge that Jesus would take care of these little girls even when I couldn’t.

More warfare and more blessings...



One of the greatest blessings of this time was that Levi's son, Jacob, whom he fathered with a woman he had met in a psychiatric hospital in Florida, was rescued from foster care by the diligent efforts of our son, Luke, and his wife, Misti, and Jacob was able to come home to Texas and become a permanent part of Luke and Misti's family.

Here is Misti's story of this miracle...

*The day that I heard about Jacob going into foster care was right after serving at a women's retreat weekend called Tres Dias. That Monday we received a phone call/text that Jacob had been placed into foster care and could we pray about this situation. I was completely devastated and in shock that it had gotten to this point. Jacob was born in June of 2015 and I later found out that he had actually been placed into foster care on August 6th. So here Luke and I were in shock and thinking what in the world are we going to do. We could not in good conscience do nothing. We had a 4-month-old nephew sitting in foster care with strangers. We prayed and felt the Lord strongly leading us to try and reach out to see what we could do. I immediately got on the phone and started making calls to try to get someone to give me any information they had. The biggest hurdle we had to overcome was we were living in Texas and Jacob was in Florida. There is a whole different system that you have to go through when foster kids cross state lines. On October 5, 2015 I called the 4th Judicial Circuit for the county he was in. I spoke with a woman who took down my number and I did not hear anything back. On October 6, 2015 I contacted the number again and I was transferred multiple times until I received a different number to call. I spoke this time with a woman and she took my information and said she would email the court liaison. She did tell me should could not divulge any information and that someone would call me back. She did say to contact her back if I didn't hear from anyone. On October 7, 2015 I called her back and let her know that I had not heard anything back and she just let me know that she would send an email. Several days went by and we waited and prayed and discussed what we could do at this point because no one was willing to talk to me. On October 13, 2015 I contacted a lawyer here in Texas and explained the situation. She advised me that I would need to find a family lawyer in Florida that specialized in CPS to help me. I emailed several and called several to see if anyone would listen and give me some advice on how to proceed. Praise the Lord, I finally spoke with a very sweet older gentleman who had handled many family CPS cases and had wisdom and was willing to listen for free. He gave us very practical advice and we hung up the phone praying to God how would we ever afford him. That very afternoon my phone rang with an area code from the county where Jacob was living and it was his case worker directly. I immediately started crying and praising God that he had moved in such a big way! Jacob's case worker was a total God send. He was so nice and so willing to help. Then we came to our first major hurdle. He said, "just come on down to the office and we will meet and go from there." At that point, I stated that we were in Texas and running down to his office was not going to be possible. So, what now? He was in a bit of a shock and had to re-group pretty quickly.*

*What ultimately happened is he got the ball rolling on his end to figure out how we were going to circumvent state lines and make my home an option for Jacob. He contacted his people and they in turn contacted Texas CPS and we were able to get the paperwork moving forward and get a home study done. We had people in our community donate money, time, and food during this time to get our house "home study" ready. Several months later in December we had our home study and man did God move in another mighty way. We had the nicest CPS worker come and do our home study. She was so sincere and caring about our situation and it was probably the easiest part of the whole thing. Which is not the norm if you have had any dealings with CPS. We*

*were hopeful that Jacob would be able to come to us soon. The court was to make a final decision on his case in the next months of January or February and we just waited. Jacobs' case worker would contact us every few weeks or I would call him and get updates about how he was doing and growing. We were able to send Jacob some presents in the mail and the case worker would make sure they got delivered. In February we got the call that we had been dreading. The judge decided to grant Jacob's mother more time. We stepped back and said, "Okay God, if you are closing a door we are going to follow your lead. If Jacob is meant to stay with his mom then give us peace." We didn't hear another word about Jacob until April 2016. In April 2016 we got a call from the case worker that the judge was not liking what he was seeing and that we should be prepared. Our hopes were high but again we didn't hear anything else. July 20, 2016, we got the call that we had been praying for. The judge decided that Jacob could come to Texas and be with us. On July 25, 2016 I received an email that was signed and dated by the district Judge and that same day Luke and I were in the car heading to Florida. We drove all night and arrived in Florida on July 26, 2016. At 2pm that afternoon we were meeting Jacob for the first time and at 2:53pm we were in the car heading for Texas.*

*By the beginning of 2017 the judge decided to close the case and give legal guardianship to Luke and me. He was now a permanent part of our family. God had answered many prayers and carried our whole family through this time.*

Every Tuesday night, they come to our home for Bible Study and little Jacob Matthew Bullen runs and jumps in my arms and lays his little head on my chest and I thank him for giving me Jacob Hugs. There is a God, He is mighty, and He loves us.

On December 18, 2017, I was meditating on my precious friend the Holy Spirit and how I hunger for Him and I wrote down this poem...

Our hearts and minds please set ablaze  
With a passion for You all of our days

Purify our souls in Your fiery furnace of love  
Fanned by Your wings oh blessed Heavenly Dove

Engulf us in Your love oh sweet Holy One  
Don't extinguish the inferno until Your work is done

Anoint us with mighty power, clothe us from on high  
Flow through us to a thirsty world until the day we die

Let us feel Your power flowing through us changing lives  
Fill us with joyous wonder as each miracle arrives

Let us watch Your winds of renewal dance across the crowd  
Then hands raised and eyes moistened hear the voices cry aloud

Let us join You sweet sweet Spirit as You transform the nations  
Let us rejoice again and again in joyful celebrations

Whisk us up to heaven when our life down here is o'er

And hold us in Your arms secure forever more

By Matt Bullen, December 18, 2017

In January, 2018 our daughter, Beverly, married a wonderful young man named Travis at our church in The Woodlands and it was a wonderful and holy day. The day that Travis asked for my blessing and for Beverly's hand in marriage, I gave him a big hug and said, "Travis, I have been praying for a man like you since Beverly was born. You have my blessing with gratitude to God."

We didn't know what the next chapter of our story would look like but we were pretty confident that it would be MIRACULOUS!!!



## **28: The Flame Spreads To Four Continents -**

***"Do you want to have a heart always on fire for God? Do you want to know the continuous anointing of the Holy Spirit? Are you anxious to be used in the service of your Lord? Would you always be aflame with the power of God? ...Perennial revival is only possible where there is continuous brokenness of heart which comes from making it a point to be alone with God every day." – Oswald J. Smith***

Understandably, we breathed a giant sigh of relief when the clock chimed midnight on New Year's Eve 2017. It had been a crazy year of trials and miracles and we were ready for 2018, and though still in recovery and reeling some from the flood, we were excited for a new year.

When I awoke in that hospital bed in the ICU on May 4th, 2017 and began to understand how broken my body was and that I was nearly blind, one of the first things that came to my mind was, "Well Lord, I may not be able to preach ever again or go to the nations like I'm used to, but I can still pray." I lifted my right hand to my forehead in a salute and said out loud, "Yes Sir, Captain." There was a great contentment in me at that moment but I couldn't have known about the grand smile that must have spread across His Fatherly face because He knew that in 2018 I would set a personal record and preach on 4 continents in one year. How GOOD our God is and how unsearchable His adventures for us.

On January 4, 2018 the Holy Spirit woke me up at 2:30 a.m. I prayed for an hour expecting to go back to sleep but at 3:30 a.m. I knew that was not going to happen. A fire was burning in my soul to not quit, not give up, not assume that my only ministry now would be prayer for the nations. I got up, grabbed my laptop, and began to create a radical "Mission Critical To Do/Prayer List" for 2018. By 6:00 a.m. I had it finished and my heart was on fire.

The item at the top of the list was a crusade in Pakistan. That had been the next place I was invited to go when I fell. In fact, two days before I fell, my son, Luke, and I sat on our balcony and he committed to go with me to Pakistan. So, one of the things that I put together in my new late-night list building was a budget of \$12,000 to go to Pakistan. We had no money and no idea where it would come from but began to pray hard that God would allow me to preach for my first time on the Asian Continent in 2018. Rapidly, the money began to come in without us telling anyone but God and very soon we had \$12,000! Then we began to realize that it would take more like \$22,000 and sure enough more began to come in miraculously and my health and strength grew as well. I was so proud of my wife, Lisa, and daughter, Rebekah, as they wholly embraced this vision and began to work hard to bring it about. We put out a "fleece" to the Lord. "If our Pakistani Visas are approved we will know that this is Your will and Your plan." Sure enough, quickly our Visas were approved. One morning as we walked into church a dear brother, Shaun, asked me, "Where are you going next?" I said, "Pakistan" He said, "J.J. and I are in! We'll video document the trip and I'll help fund it! Ok if I invite myself?" We said, "SURE!" Praise God!! Miracle!!

To compound the miracle, the next week, I received a message from a Facebook friend, Pastor Ruben, from Nepal, a country that had been on our prayer list for years. He was planning to be in town and

wanted to meet for lunch. While we were enjoying an anointed conversation as we shared all the miracles of the last year and our plans for 2018, Ruben suddenly asked, "Nepal is close to Pakistan, why don't you hop over and hold a crusade for us in Nepal?" The moment he spoke those words, everyone at the table felt the Holy Spirit descend on us like a blanket and it was a sweet confirmation. We quickly crunched the numbers and realized we could do it!

There were numerous little trials and miracles leading up to the trip. A week before we were supposed to leave, we received word that the government of Pakistan had detected suicide bomber activity in the city we had planned for our crusades and we were banned from coming to that area. \$5,000 had already been invested and was irretrievable. We were driving home from a ministry weekend praying about whether to cancel the trip or go another direction when suddenly, we looked into the stormy sky, and literally saw the Pakistani flag. The sky was green with a crescent moon and the planet, Venus, positioned exactly like the design of the flag of Pakistan. We gasped and said, "Yes Sir, Lord. Even if we just fly to a major city in Pakistan and spend the week prayer-walking around the city, we will go." A moment later, I remembered that I had an evangelist friend who had been to Pakistan and so I called him though I didn't know where among the nations he might be at that moment. To my surprise, he answered and by the time we got home we had all the details confirmed for government approved larger crusades in a safer location. The next week, after just missing a tornado and major flooding that delayed our flights, we flew out on March 28, 2018, one week shy of a year from my nearly fatal fall and miraculous recovery to Pakistan! And then the next week to Nepal! BUT GOD!!!!!!

Oh, how we prayed for a fresh anointing! After 24 hours in the air, we arrived in Pakistan at 5:00 a.m. on Good Friday and at 8:00 a.m. I was preaching to a packed church of thousands and the Sr. Pastor assured me that the sermon was being broadcast on their Christian television station, Isaac TV, and going out to 47 countries. WOW! Praise Jesus! Each morning, I would preach to a packed church for their morning prayer service and it would also be broadcast on Isaac TV. Lines and lines of people would wait for us to lay hands and pray over them. It was known that the Christian God answers prayer and heals, so the people would come and camp out at the church and only go home once they were healed. God is using this ministry to spread a revival in Pakistan so mighty, the world has not yet grasped it.

The grandest surprise for me personally, came on the following Monday as we drove out to a more remote portion of the countryside, to preach a gospel crusade among a 90% Muslim population. Imagine our thrill when we arrived and 6 men wearing black T-shirts with white letters which read "church security" escorted us to the open-air meeting with AK-47s slung over their shoulders. As we walked, fresh rose petals rained down on us from all of the adjacent roof tops. People continually stepped up in the crowded passageways and laid strung flowers around our necks. Nothing could have prepared us to step into the clearing and see upwards of 5,000 Muslims standing before a stage waiting to hear from us! I preached my heart out and my wife later said she could literally feel the Holy Spirit blowing across the crowd. When I asked them if they wanted to give their whole life to Jesus, all 5000 lunged forwards with an audible gasp raising their hands to heaven. They prayed out loud in Urdu to receive Christ. MIRACLE!!! The next night, the same thing in another city, and the final night, the same again.



Only heaven knows all the little and big miracles that aligned themselves to make this trip happen. The flames are still spreading.

Next, we flew to Kathmandu, Nepal then drove 7 hours through the Himalayas to a remote area and over the next several days preached among the Hindu “Ratcatcher” tribes of Nepal and once again the blessed Jesus surprised us with many souls, not reluctantly or skeptically but hungrily and eagerly, coming to Christ.

One day, I was blessed to teach a whole church building packed with pastors, that had come from as far away as India, on the Secrets of the Kingdom. One of those Indian pastors went back, took all of my sermons that are currently available in audio or video, and broadcast them to thousands. Another night, I was blessed to teach another group of pastors in a hotel. As they sang acapella, in their native tongues, from little worn-out pocket hymn books, the presence of God was so heavy in the room, it was difficult to stand. It felt as if we had entered heaven for a moment. At the end of the meeting, they each came with tears in their eyes hugging me and thanking me for coming and sharing.

Holy Spirit moments are too numerous to name but suffice it to say that God took the trials of 2017 and turned them into the chance of a lifetime! Glory!

The next morning, I sat in the courtyard garden of United Nepal Hotel on April 9, 2018 and wrote, “Where You lead, I will follow...”

We flew back to North America shaking our heads and saying, “Only Heaven knows what’s next for this family...”



My family and I were crazy blessed to speak at 8 different Tres Dias retreats with 6 different Tres Dias communities in 2018. Only heaven will be able to tell all of the God moments, life changes that happened, and the life-long friendships established. Just three of the many stories of how God used these retreats to radically change lives may illustrate the impact.

I was speaking at another Tres Dias retreat and a lady came up to me and showed me a beautiful tattoo on her otherwise clear forearm with the name and colors of her 3-day retreat that spring as she said, "This may give you a little idea of how your messages impacted my life on that weekend." Wow! Only Jesus... Another young woman from that same spring retreat sat down with me and shared how she is going to graduate from university this year and found her own non-profit ministry and begin to go to the nations. Wow! Only Jesus... Another young woman, radically saved and rescued a short time before, left the weekend assured by our stories that God could use her and she went and served in Africa.

I am beyond humbled and blessed as I look forward to many more of these Tres Dias weekends in the years ahead. "Yes Sir, Captain."

Another thought that came to my mind that morning in the ICU was, "Well, I guess our 10-year dream of a safehouse initiative in Colombia for abused girls, will never be finished because I will no longer be physically or financially able to lead the charge." But God! Once again, He must have smiled because the third continent I preached on in 2018 was South America. That spring, Pastor Frankie came to me and said, "Well, when you were in the coma I wrote in your journal that Lisa had on the table in the waiting room that when you wake up I will go with you to Bogota! So let's go." Hallelujah! Our Colombian son-in-law, Oscar, set everything up with the leadership of the church and we set out for Colombia with our senior pastor, Frankie, our director of ministries, youth pastor, two interns, and other church leaders. We were so blessed to meet up with our dear friend Pastor Jordan in Soacha and minister in several safehouses and schools for street children. One night, our Colombian daughter, Ginary and a friend surprised us when we walked into the hotel. They had come to have dinner with us. Pastor Frankie and some of the leaders and my daughters and I sat up late into the night as they shared their testimonies of abuse and the life of orphans on the street. It was a miraculous moment. Pastor Frankie led Ginary that night into a deeper walk with Jesus than we thought possible and God put a great desire in his heart through the testimonies of these precious girls to take the lead in establishing the safehouse in Colombia! Praise God! Now, every two weeks my pastor, other leaders, my dear Colombian friend Pastor Jordan, myself and our daughter, Ginary, video conference together and plans are moving forward! The safehouse should be open and operational in 2020. Now, Pastor Frankie and our church do their own crusade trips to Bogota! Only Jesus...

Again, as I lay in the ICU that morning in May of 2017, I had another thought, "Well, I guess Mercy's House, our partially built school project in Liberia, named in honor of our Liberian daughter, Mercy, will never be finished because once again I will no longer be physically or financially able to lead the charge." But God! The fourth continent I was blessed to preach on in 2018 was Africa.

As we prepared to go, my sweet warrior princess wife, Lisa, posted this,

*430lbs of luggage going to Liberia tomorrow full of teddy bears, coloring books, crayons, pens, pencils, paints, colored pencils, play dough, cars, trucks, 30lbs of gospel tracks, and so much more!! Because of your help we are able to give 100 teddy bears, 100 coloring books with paints, crayons, or colored pencils, and over 100 other gifts and school supplies!! Rebekah and Matt are sharing a carryon and one checked luggage so we can transport all the*

*gifts to the children!! What a beautiful Christmas you guys have provided!! Thank You... we couldn't go if you didn't send us!!*

We arrived in Liberia and took all of the gifts to Pastor Paye's school, McDaniel Faith Academy, and Rebekah gave them out. Then Pastor Paye walked me around the grounds and I got a surprise of a lifetime. In large letters on a blue wall were the words, Lisa Phillips Bullen Nursery School. He explained to me that they had opened the nursery school while I was in the coma and he had been reading Lisa's prayers on Facebook and so he named the nursery school in her honor. What a beautiful tribute to a mighty woman of God.

The next day, I was blessed, with my daughter, Rebekah, my friend, Bruce, and our director of Mercy's House, Pastor Paye, to visit the village, Glenyouway, where we were building Mercy's House. Rebekah had been there before but it was my first chance to stand on the property. It was surreal to look up and see the roof and know that the last thing I did before my tragic fall was to send the final payment for that roof. Miracle! We were blessed to meet with the chief and elders who assured me that Jesus had raised me up from my deathbed just for their village because they needed Mercy's House to educate and disciple the next generation of their tribe. Wow! Only Jesus... We gathered up that morning and prayed and planned. We needed to put in a dirt subfloor, then cement floor, plaster the building, put in doors and windows, add desks and black boards, and then school could open. My friend, Bruce, suggested that we come up with a budget and we figured out if we could just get \$75 per student at 360 students we could finish the school. When we got back to America, we would put out the word!

I was also blessed to speak at their inaugural National Prayer Conference and Pastor Paye posted this after,

*Wonderful! Pastor Matt E. Bullen speaking to church leaders (Pastors, Deacons, Evangelists, praisers etc.) from ten subdivisions of Liberia; organized by the Liberia National Prayer Network in Kakata, Margibi County. Lord, thank you for saving your Servant, and bringing him back to Liberia.*

The next day was New Year's Eve and also Rebekah's 30<sup>th</sup> birthday. The Liberians threw a wonderful feast and each of them wore a T-shirt with a photo of Rebekah silkscreened on the front. They had also made one for her as well. Too sweet.

For the crusades, we rented a soccer field. Each night, an hour before sundown, Rebekah and I, with the prayer warriors, would march around this soccer field in what they call "Warfare Prayer" while the worship team began to sing. We would march and pray for an hour and the people would begin to come from the surrounding villages. After 2 hours of worship, I would preach. Oh! The fire would fall! I preached a series of 5 messages on Supernatural Secrets. 1<sup>st</sup> night, Secrets of Planet Shakers, 2<sup>nd</sup> night, Secrets of Power, 3<sup>rd</sup> night, Secrets of Heaven Shakers, 4<sup>th</sup> night Secrets of the Furnace, 5<sup>th</sup> service, Secrets of Walking in the Miracle.

The crowds grew and grew into the hundreds and each night dozens would be saved and rededicated to Jesus. The final night, the crowd was so large, they stopped traffic and people brought their own chairs and filled the street adjacent to the soccer field. Praise God! Bruce and Rebekah would video the entire sermon each night and I would post online.

One night, I preached on The Secrets of Planet Shakers and posted it. Later, I received a message from my pastor friend, Ravi, in India regarding this sermon he had then rebroadcast on Indian television...

"Jesus loves you man of God. The teachings you sent was so powerful keep doing what you are doing, please."

Yes Sir, Captain...



## 29: Mercy Miracles March On -

***“Whenever the Holy Spirit sees an opportunity to glorify Jesus through you, He will take your entire being and set you ablaze with glowing devotion to Jesus Christ.” – Oswald Chambers***



Over the years, Mercy has changed our lives in more ways than we can count. She is a very big-hearted girl and we all have grown to love her more than can be expressed in words.

Stunning spiritual warfare that could fill its own book has surrounded her since she arrived in America but she has fiercely fought through it all and has arisen as a bright and shining light for Jesus.

A few Father's Days ago she wrote me,

*“To the Best Dad. I Love you with all my Heart!! Words are inadequate to express my gratitude for you. Every so often I wonder what did I do to have such an amazing man for a Dad? You are such an inspiration to me, through you I've come to learn a lot about God's Love. For that, I'm grateful. Thanks for always having my back. – Mercy”*

Like every father of a daughter, I have prayed and prayed for the right man to come along to be a husband to my girl, but even I could not have chosen a man as perfect as Bobby Peabody. Only Jesus... Mercy and Bobby knew each other as children in Liberia, Africa and then met up again a few years ago at college in Arlington, Texas. Bobby came to our big family Christmas gathering in 2016 and Lisa, all the adult children and spouses, and I fell in love with him. As we sat around the Christmas dinner table we all told Mercy, “Well, Mercy, either you can have Bobby as a husband or a brother because we are keeping him!” We all laughed and rejoiced that God had answered another miracle prayer regarding our beloved daughter/sister, Mercy Bullen.

Over the last 3 years Bobby has become like a son to me in every way. We have enjoyed so much together. Last spring, we were blessed to serve together at a men's three-day Christian retreat in Oklahoma and the Holy Spirit showed up in a mighty way. I was blessed as one of the pastors on the weekend to kneel down and wash Bobby's feet as an illustration of Christian love and servant leadership. At one point, the MC announced, “If you have a father in the room and would like to show him a gesture of love, feel free to do that now.” Bobby jumped up and came to me and took my arm. “Come on Dad,” he said, and led me to the front of the room where he proceeded to take off my shoes and socks and he



washed my feet. Rarely in my life have I felt so loved. Someday Bobby will have to tell his whole story and especially what God did for him that weekend. It was sweetly supernatural.



To say the least, I was crazy blessed and humbled to walk my beautiful Mercy down the aisle on July 27, 2019 and give her hand to Bobby in marriage. I know heaven rejoiced as did the Bullen family on this blessed day. With Lisa as the mother of the bride, Rebekah as maid of honor, Beverly as bridesmaid, Brooke as Bridesmaid, Misti, grandkids, Joy, Joseph, and Jacob assisting with the reception, Luke, Travis, and Oscar as ushers, our granddaughter Lily as the flower-girl and our grandson Maurice as the ring-bearer, and many of our dearest friends present and serving selflessly, we could not have scripted a more beautiful or fulfilling wedding day if we tried. Only Jesus...



And Mercy's House? On September 30, 2019, Mercy's House Liberia opened and every day Liberian children are learning to read and write and learning about a Savior who loves them very much. The other day they had their very first chapel service and worshipped the Lord together. Hallelujah!

The miracles march on... You can keep up with all that is happening at Mercy's House at [www.mercyshouse.org](http://www.mercyshouse.org)

## 30: Mission Moroto -

***“My fear is that our people will become content to live without the fire, the power, the excitement, the supernatural element that makes us great.”***

***– John Wesley***

On January 1, 1990, I spent the whole day dreaming, planning, and praying. I was 24 years old, had been preaching for 8 years and I was excited about a new decade and what the future held. I planned out the next 50 years and dreamed of how God would use my family to impact His kingdom. Though I vastly underestimated the intensity of the spiritual warfare we would pass through, I greatly rejoice and praise God that over the next 30 years the miracles have far outpaced the trials! As we entered the 2020's I had no idea the things God was about to do!

On February 1, 2020, I was speaking at a women's retreat in San Antonio and my dear friend, Pastor Tom Bright, as we sat at lunch together said, "Matt, I can't explain but the Holy Spirit just keeps dropping your name in my spirit about a need that is out there. You remember I am on the board of a ministry called Moroto Ministries Inc. that has an orphanage in Moroto, Uganda East Africa? Well, the founder, Bill Behrmann, passed away last October and the funds have dried up and we have no one to take over for him and I'm afraid we will have to put those 35 orphans out on the street. And the Holy Spirit keeps dropping your family in my heart about it."

I said, "Tom, you know my daughter Rebekah?" He said, "Of course." I said, "She ran a project exactly like you are talking about in Zambia, Africa for two years and she has been praying about what the Lord wants her to do in Africa next." Tom put his face in his hands and wept out loud. "I knew God was telling me to tell you about Moroto!"

Lisa and Rebekah were at the San Antonio Riverwalk waiting for me to finish this retreat. I texted them and said, "You are not going to believe what I have to tell you when you get here." And so began our exploration of this potential Kingdom opportunity. The very next week the COVID-19 pandemic swept the world. We met on Zoom with the board and prayed and waited to see what God would do.

Immediately our family realized that this was much bigger financially than we had any ability to deal with, barring a miracle. Rebekah wrestled with the Lord if this was His perfect will for her. The moment she surrendered, and we all agreed by faith alone to step out and take on this project, \$20,000 came in from donors who had never previously helped our ministry! It was a very clear sign from our loving Lord.

We began formulating a plan to visit Moroto, Uganda in July of 2020, however, the pandemic had closed the airports. By faith, we took over financial responsibility of the orphanage on September 1, 2020 and renamed it Mission Moroto. We tried again in October 2020 to go and visit Moroto but once again everything was closed due to the pandemic. While we waited to go, I built a webpage at [www.missionmoroto.org](http://www.missionmoroto.org) and we began getting sponsorships for the children and praying like crazy.







Finally, we flew to Entebbe, Uganda on January 17, 2021. We hopped on a Missionary Aviation Fellowship prop plane and landed in Moroto, Uganda on January 20, 2021! Praise the Name of Jesus! We met the hungry children, saw the dilapidated buildings, and Rebekah fell in love. Lisa and I were taken aback at how remote and how desperate the area was at first but quickly saw that this was from the Lord. We gave out the clothes and many gifts that people had sent and had a wonderful time getting to know these precious souls. On Sunday, January 24, 2021, I was blessed to preach at the church that met under the trees on the property, and we had a wonderful day.



The next day, we headed west to Abim, Uganda and I was blessed to preach all day long to a packed church and then we went on to Gulu and finally were super blessed to go on Safari at Murchison Falls, one of the top-rated Safaris in all of Africa. We floated on the Nile and saw lots of hippos, crocodiles, elephants, etc.

The next day we drove with a guide across the plains and saw lions, giraffes, buffaloes, antelope, warthogs, and so much more. It was a

heavenly finish to our first trip to Uganda. We came home, Rebekah sold her car and began packing to move to Mission Moroto permanently.

And only heaven knew what was to come next...



## **31: The Miracle Of Our Lives -**

***“Surround yourself with people in need  
and give away love as if you’re made of it.”  
- Bob Goff***

In praise to our Heavenly Father, our Lord Jesus Christ, and our sweet Holy Spirit, and in humble gratitude to our sponsors, donors, and prayer warriors, here are the miracles of Mission Moroto 2020 to 2022.



**Miracles Inside Our Fence**





**200 Bush Orphans Rescued**



**Built 7 New Buildings  
Remodeled 7 Old Buildings**





**Running Water**



**Solar Powered Lighting**





**3 Meals A Day**



**100 Footlockers Of Medical Supplies, Toys, Clothes  
Brought From America**





**All Children Finally Healthy**



**100% School Enrollment**





**Family Worship 3 Nights A Week**

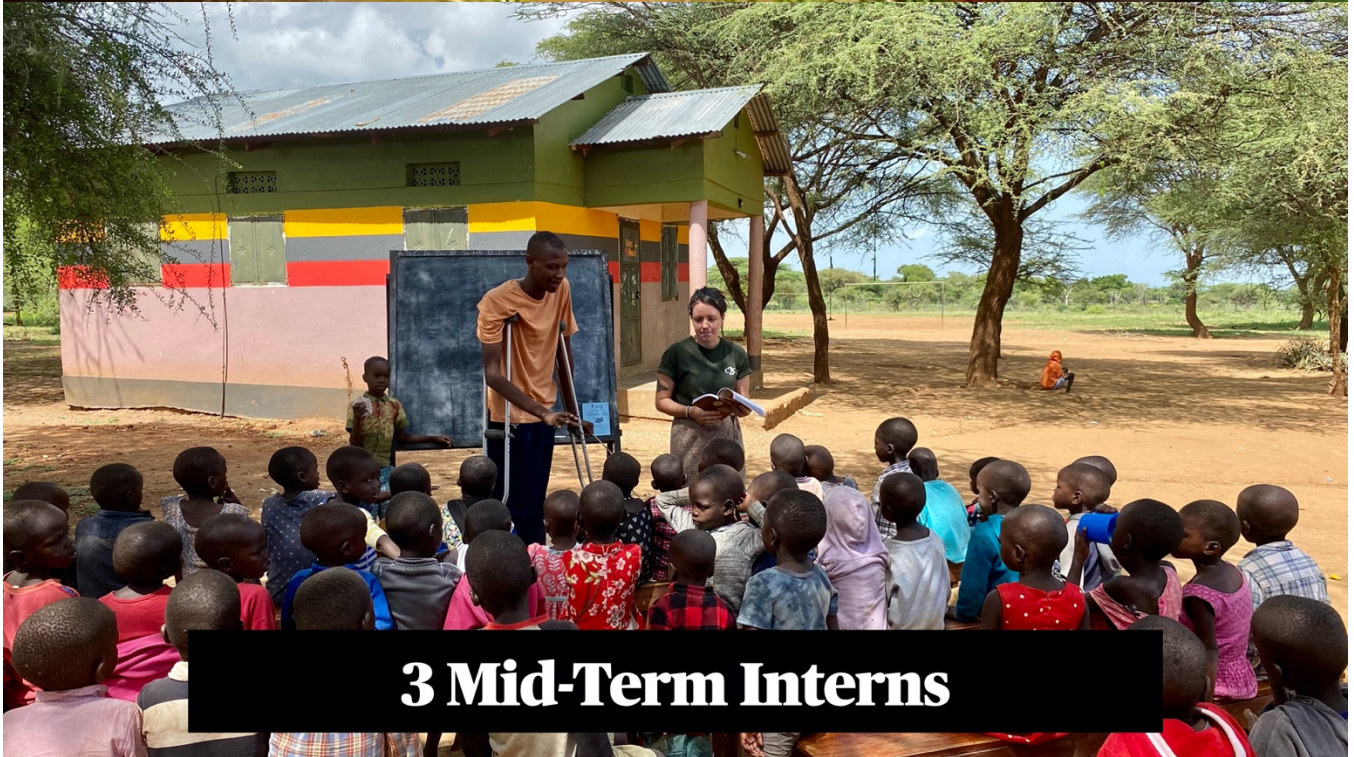


**Heavenly Church Every Sunday**





**Scores Of Salvations & Baptisms**



**3 Mid-Term Interns**





**Short-Term Mission Teams**



**Miracles Outside Our Fence**





**Secured 143 Acres Of Land**



**Preached To Millions On The Radio**





**Distributed Thousands Of Pounds Of Food**

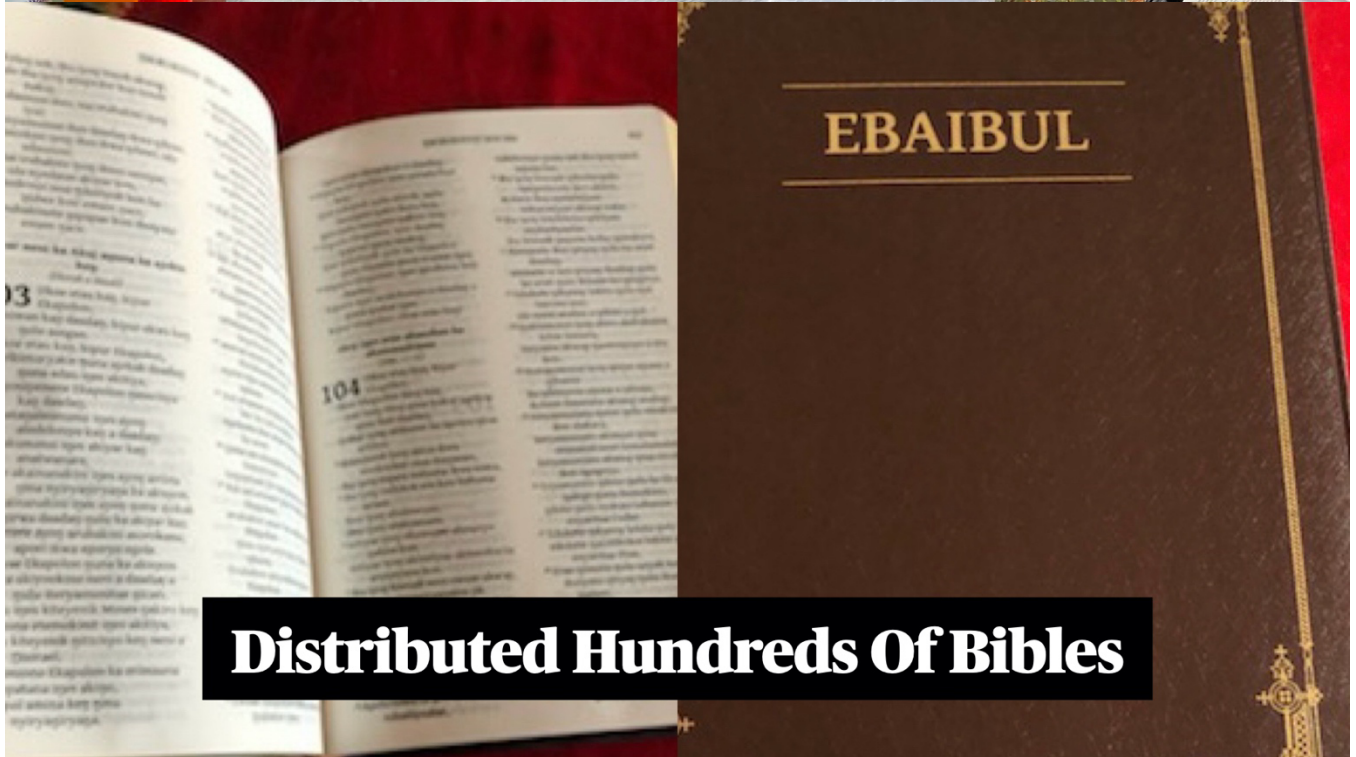


**Ministered In A Dozen Local Churches**





**Held Leadership Conferences**



**Distributed Hundreds Of Bibles**





**Preached In Unreached Villages**

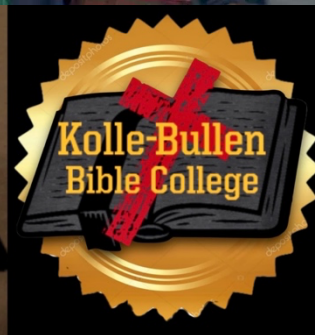


**Holding Bible School In Moroto Prison**



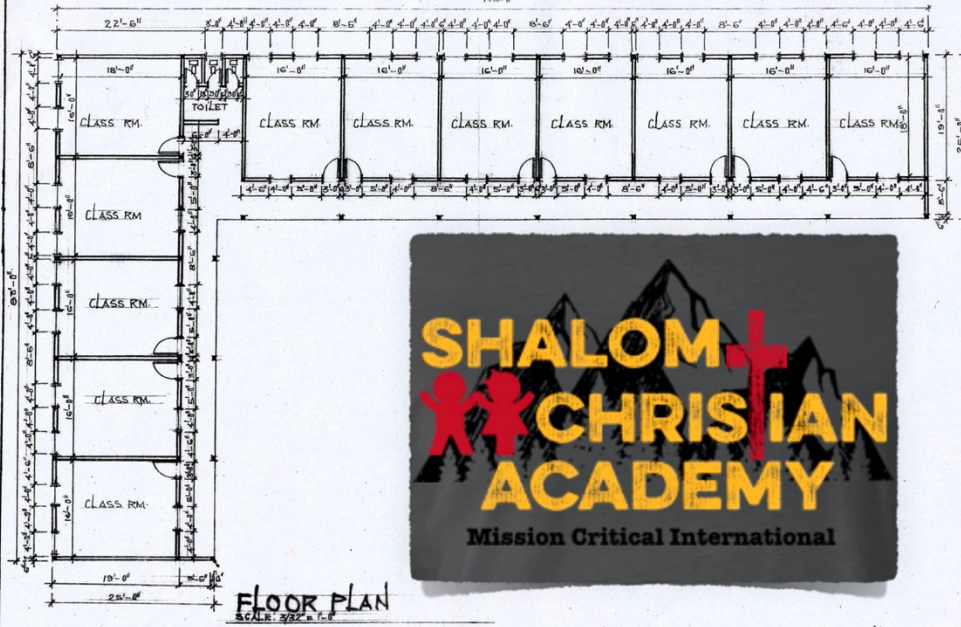


**Our New Church and Bible College  
at Mission Moroto**





# Dreams for 2023 and Beyond



**Expand Our Agricultural Endeavors**





**Gospel Outreach To Remote Tribes**



**Trade School Apprenticeships**





**Gospel Crusades Throughout Africa**



**And Only Heaven Knows What Else!**

MISSION CRITICAL

international

