

Answer

Business Men's Fellowship International



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- **Who knows what you need?** P.8
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Forgiveness Behind The Wall

April 14 of 1997 appeared to be like any other day. Approaching the classroom, I saw our teacher standing in the hallway. I greeted him with a hug and walked inside.

Recognizing a woman who occasionally visited, I nodded a greeting. I also noticed a man I had never seen before. When he nodded his head, I acknowledged his presence.

Walking to my customary seat in the last row, I started to take attendance. As I did, the instructor came in to open our Bible study class with prayer and singing.

After asking us to sit, the teacher smiled and introduced our guests: "This is Sister McGee and Brother Watson."

As soon as he said the man's name, I trembled. Overcome by emotion, I put my pen down and asked the person next to me if he would finish taking the roll.

It was him!

I knew this was the moment God

intended for us to meet. Only with the direction of the Holy Spirit could this have occurred.

Two years earlier, I had begun serving a sentence of 22 years to life for murder. I deeply regret that it happened. But two nights after I was arrested, fingerprinted, photographed and locked up at the county jail, something wonderful happened.

I heard there was a Bible study at 6 o'clock on Wednesdays. I had never been to one. I didn't know anything about God. Yet, for some unknown reason, that night I felt compelled to go.

During the session, a pastor told the story of Jesus Christ. What He did for every person when He died on the cross. How I could live with Him in heaven.

At the end of the service, I bowed my head. With Pastor Ed's guidance, I prayed and asked Jesus to come into my heart. I wanted Him to be Savior and Lord over my life.

Immediately I began faithfully reading the Bible. Unfortunately, I didn't understand it. But I didn't stop. I believed somehow I would gain a better understanding of what God did for us through His Son, Jesus.

About three months later I received a letter, a small New Testament and some literature — from my victim's father. I fell to my knees and wept for 2 1/2 hours, thanking God for what He was doing.

The next day I developed a new grasp of what I read in the Bible. That also marked the beginning of a deeper, more intimate relationship with God and knowing the power of Christ.

After receiving my victim's father's letter, I had told my attorney I wanted to respond. But he said I shouldn't until my case was finished. In the meantime, I prayed constantly that the Holy Spirit would help me form a response.

Six months later, I felt led to sit down and write that letter. I only intended to write a page. Instead, I wound up writing three (a lot for me). It was the most difficult letter I had ever written.

Coming from my heart, it was very emotional and painful, yet joyful. I asked him to forgive me for not corresponding earlier. I asked him to forgive me in the name of Christ for killing his son. I also

asked if he would visit and correspond with me.

About a month later, he answered. When I read his letter, I thanked God for finding the love of Christ in a man who

had every right to hate me. This kind father wrote, "As for my forgiveness to you, I give you the same forgiveness that Jesus extends to us. In His name, you are forgiven and I pray you will know the fullness of that."

Twice we arranged meetings, during special holiday celebrations sponsored by the prison church. Twice circumstances prevented that from happening.

"God, would you bring this moment to pass?" I asked after the latest disappointment. "Would You let us meet? Out of that I pray You will receive the glory."

I believed He would answer. When it happened, it would be in His time, not mine.

Still, I had no warning the day my victim's father appeared. Nobody else knew who he was or what had transpired between us prior to this evening.

When the instructor asked if anyone had anything they wanted to share, an inmate stood to tell how God was working in his life. Then my victim's father introduced himself and spoke.

He was having a difficult time

*I asked him
to forgive
me... for
killing his
son.*

emotionally because of the nature of his testimony. About halfway through, he asked me to come to the front of the class. He revealed our relationship and how God had used this tragedy for His purposes.

After he finished, he hugged me like a father would a long-lost son. The love and compassion expressed by his embrace moved me like few other things in this world.

Later, as we shared Communion, I returned to his side. We gave each other our bread and cup. When I returned to my seat, I thanked God. But I didn't know He wasn't finished.

The teacher opened his Bible to John 13. The first 17 verses describe the Lord's supper and what He did after He ate. Jesus, the Creator of the universe and Savior of the world, humbled himself. He took off his clothes, wrapped a towel around his waist, knelt down and washed His disciples' feet.

We prayed after he finished reviewing that passage. With head bowed, I suddenly felt a hand on my right shoulder. I looked up to see this father standing there. He asked me to turn around.

Because we were in a correctional facility, we couldn't have a wash basin or regular towels. The instructor had provided us with baby wipes and paper towels. But it wasn't necessary to have traditional elements. What mattered came from the heart.

As I watched in amazement, the man who had lost his son at my hand knelt, removed my shoes and socks, and washed my feet. After drying them, he prayed for me before putting my shoes and socks

back on.

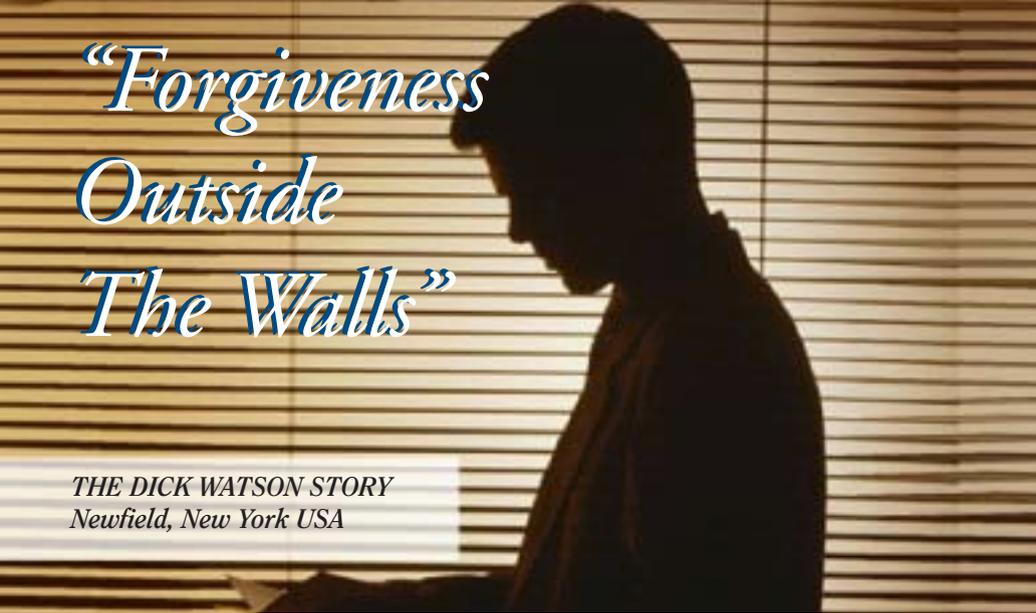
Matthew 6:14-15 says, "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (NKJV).

How casually we can read those words. But when I saw them lived out in front of me, I felt humiliated. It was I who should have washed his feet.

I learned a valuable lesson that night. When we ask God for something to glorify His name, He will be faithful and perform things far above anything we think may happen. I know. I found cleansing forgiveness behind prison walls.



Rick Van Amburg is a prisoner at the Elmira Correctional Facility in Elmira, New York. His address is Rick J. Van Amburg 96B0741, P.O. Box 500, Elmira, NY 14902-0500.



“Forgiveness Outside The Walls”

THE DICK WATSON STORY
Newfield, New York USA

hat started out as a beautiful, sunny day quickly turned colder than the customary February chill in western New York. I was working in my greenhouse when my ex-wife’s father-in-law appeared at the door.

“Dick, you may want to sit down,” he said. “I have some bad news.”

I wobbled as I sank into a chair. The look on his face and tone of his voice let me know this was going to be pretty bad.

“Shawn has been killed,” he said, voice trembling. “The police investigating the case believe he has been murdered.”

My oldest son? Gone? Trying to keep up a brave front, I sat quietly and expressed little emotion. After he left, I called our pastor. As soon as I said, “My son has been killed,” I fell apart.

My wife, Joanne, picked up the phone to finish the conversation. Then she began calling other family members.

What do you do when a loved one suddenly vanishes? When not tending to funeral arrangements, I immersed myself in crossword puzzles and movies.

The next week passed like a hazy dream. I don’t remember much of it. Somehow we selected a casket, bought a grave, prepared for the funeral and buried my son.

As if that weren’t bad enough, during this time we learned the awful details of Shawn’s death. Beaten with a baseball bat, his assailant then shot him with his own shotgun to make it look like suicide.

When I related this to our pastor, he said, “Satan meant this for evil but God will raise good out of it.”

Though it seemed impossible, that’s what happened.

As the funeral approached, my ex-wife released bitterness stemming from our divorce. She had clung to it for more than 20 years.

We asked our pastor to explain during the funeral that Jesus is the way to eternal life and we can find forgiveness through believing in Him. Someone overheard my son's ex-wife accepting Jesus as her Savior that day.

Despite these positive steps, I struggled when the police had arrested my son's murderer. To cope, I buried myself in work, church and our local Christian businessmen's chapter.

As chapter president, I had arranged for a man named Duane Swilley to visit our area. He would speak to eight meetings in six days. This was about six weeks after my son's funeral.

Near the end of the fourth meeting, Dune said he felt led to speak about forgiveness. Since I hadn't told him about my son's death or my pain, I knew the Holy Spirit had prompted him.

Emotion overwhelmed me. As tears bubbled up, a group of men surrounded me. In that moment, I knew God was asking me to forgive the man who had killed Shawn.

Weeks passed. The Lord kept nudging me to write the killer. God showed me that forgiving Rick was for my benefit. It would block Satan from sowing a seed of bitterness in my heart.

After dragging my feet, I finally wrote. I explained that through the Lord, Jesus Christ, I forgave him. More importantly, I told him he needed to know Jesus as his personal Savior. I also enclosed a New Testament and some magazines like this one.

Months passed, with a lot of legal maneuvering. I didn't hear from Rick, but later learned his attorney advised him not to contact me.

More time passed before the prosecutor's office called. Rick was going to plead guilty. After bracing ourselves for a lengthy trial and the accompanying media circus, we were shocked.

When I saw the defendant enter the courthouse the day of sentencing, compassion filled my heart. I sensed no anger or hatred, only sadness. I saw that anger is not the kind of response that glorifies God.

In a few moments of anger, many lives were changed. I would never see my son again. He wouldn't see his children grow up. They would no longer know the security and love of their father.

Revenge and bitterness would be the natural reaction for a father who lost his son. But forgiveness is the right choice.

Rick touched on that theme before his sentencing. He asked for forgiveness and hoped others would be able to forgive

him as I had.

My son's murderer was sent to the state prison at Elmira, only 30 miles from our home. This was significant. The Lord had already shown me that I would meet him face to face and extend forgiveness in person. The short distance made this possible.

Other "coincidences" took place:

* I met the wife of the pastor who had led Rick to Christ while he awaited trial. She told of his hunger for God and how he

...God
was
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killed
Shawn.

always had questions about the Bible.

* Rick joined a Bible study at the prison led by a friend of mine.

* That led to me visiting the facility as a special, one-time volunteer.

That night, I had my chance to share with the prisoners that this meeting had been arranged by God. I told them I had an intimate connection to the group. My son's killer was part of it.

After speaking from the Bible passage found in 2 Corinthians 5:16-21, I asked Rick to join me at the front of the room. There I forgave him as God had told me I would. I embraced him and told him we were brothers.

Then I told the other inmates we are called to be ministers of reconciliation.

During a foot washing service that night, I washed Rick's feet. God's peace and love filled my heart. That left me in awe of the mercy God extends to us.

I know there was a time when I would not have been able to forgive. But this gave me an opportunity to see how much my heavenly Father forgave me. I wasn't in prison for my sins. Yet, I could see how much I had sinned against God.

The Lord gave me special grace for that circumstance. This one act of forgiveness doesn't mean I am able to forgive everyone who has hurt me. Like most people, I still must work at forgiving others.

Several weeks after this prison encounter, my wife and I attended a conference in Toronto. I had the opportunity to share with several thousand people how God heals life's hurts and take us to new heights.

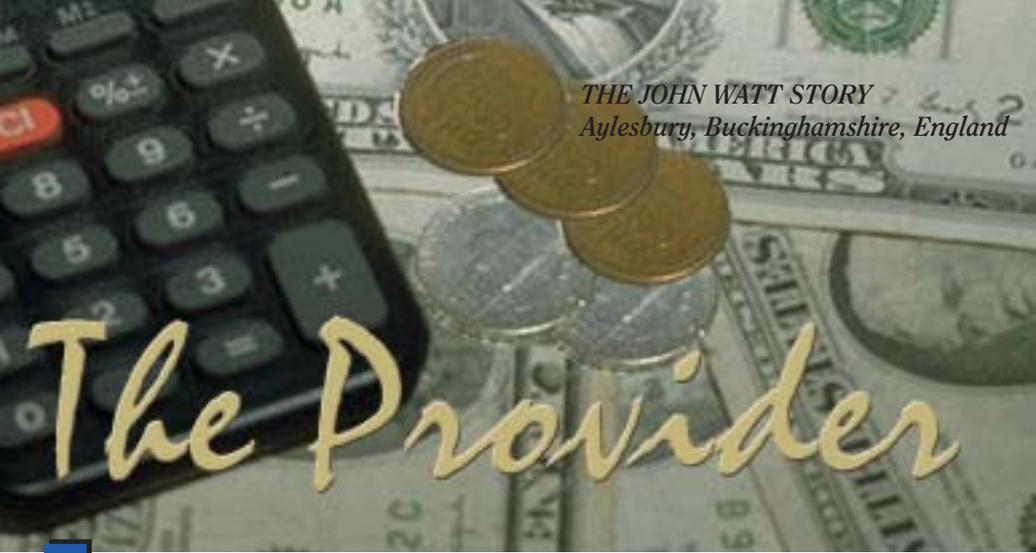
A few months later, Joanne and I again shared our testimony at a Business Men's

Fellowship couples' meeting. We were able to pray with many people that night who had suffered losses in their lives. And with others who had been unable to forgive those who mistreated them.

As my pastor prophesied, what Satan intended for evil God turned into good. And it all started with forgiveness. The same forgiveness Jesus Christ offers to anyone who accepts Him as Savior and Lord.

Dick Watson is a member of the Cortland, New York, chapter of Business Men's Fellowship. He works as a horticultural inspector with the state agriculture department. He and his wife, Joanne, have three living children and two grandchildren. They attend the Ithaca Vineyard Fellowship.





THE JOHN WATT STORY
Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, England

The Provider

Listen, right now I've had enough!" I barked at my wife and daughter. "Why don't you head on up town and leave me alone?"

After 10 months without work, the same fate stared me in the face again. A five-week contract had just ended. Before I had even collected the fees, I worried again about how to survive. Feeling pressured, I lost my temper.

I just didn't understand how I could be in this mess, which happened years after I had accepted Jesus as my Savior and been filled with the Holy Spirit.

For years I had played around with God. Born in Wales, I became a choirboy at a young age. But once we moved to England, my interest in God faded.

I still put on a show, getting

confirmed in my teens in the Church of England. Looking back, saying "I renounce evil, I turn to Christ" didn't mean much. I felt like a fake and worried that the bishop would discover the truth.

In fact, the first time my brother explained the Christian message to me, I scoffed. That sin came into the world through one man, Adam? And then one man, Jesus, took our sins on the cross so that through faith in Him we can have our sins forgiven and receive eternal life?

Bah, I said. Mere foolishness.

Yet, as I grew up I couldn't deny God's power to change people. First my younger brother went off on a Christian holiday and returned much different. Then a noted troublemaker in my class suddenly reformed.

Still, it took until I reached the university to acknowledge Jesus as

Lord. It happened at a prayer meeting I attended with my brother. As the group prayed, I experienced the presence of Christ.

Though I couldn't see Him, He felt so real it startled me. It seemed as though He had just walked through the door. That night I learned what faith in Jesus is all about.

Several weeks later, though, I struggled with sexual temptation. As I considered getting involved in promiscuous activities, a thought entered my mind: Jesus is real and I should try to lead my life the way He wants me to go.

"I'll do my best," I vowed silently.

Immediately, the Lord spoke. Not audibly, but through a strong impression in my mind. He was going to bring me a wife.

A few weeks later I was passing a bus stop near campus. A friend waiting for the bus introduced me to a Christian girl named Kate. She captivated me.

Within a few days I asked her to marry me. That wasn't customary for this usually-reserved Britisher. Nevertheless, she accepted (and more than 20 years later, she still captivates me.)

My marriage proved to be a crucial development in my walk with God. After our wedding, Kate persuaded me to go to a lively church. There people clapped, gave prophetic messages, and spoke in funny languages, which I later learned were a spiritual gift called tongues.

While this didn't upset me, for several years, I felt the Holy Spirit passed me by. Then some friends invited me to a talk by

a university professor.

After his message, he asked who wanted to receive Jesus as Savior. Next, he said he would pray for those who wanted to follow Christ more closely. He asked those people to raise their hand.

While the speaker didn't notice my response, God did. I felt His powerful acceptance and love. Overwhelmed by God's holiness, I shook and wept. Afterwards, I felt a new boldness and desire to tell others about Jesus.

The next day, I walked into work, went to my boss and asked what he thought about Jesus. He leapt like a scared cat. Apparently his boss had asked him the same question five minutes earlier.

I never learned whether his life changed, though. I left the company a month later. After a few years in the computer business, I realized that consulting contracts could effectively double my salary and

set out on that course.

My knowledge of Oracle (the world's second largest software company) tools gained me considerable work over the years — until England plunged into a recession.

The struggle to survive that went on for nearly a year often left me in a bad mood. Having a young daughter to support by then added to the tension.

However, the day I lost my temper and told her and my wife to leave me alone, I finally calmed down and read my Bible.

When I came to Psalm 91, I started

*Jesus
is
real*

smiling about at a renewed sense of God's presence. As I read the second verse, God impressed on me that He was my fortress.

Later, as I walked through town, I muttered, "Lord, it's all very well to have these nice feelings, but what about some 'cash in hand'?"

Suddenly racked by doubts, I wondered if He really cared about me and spoke to me. Just then I looked up to see a fortress painted on the side of a church house. Below were the words, "God is my fortress, Psalm 91, verse 2."

I doubted Him no more. Not even when the continuing lack of work forced me to accept work in Saudi Arabia.

Despite my misgivings, we wound up spending 26 months there.

One reason I felt nervous about going is that I considered it a place of great spiritual darkness. But God spoke to me from Psalm 139, telling me there is no dark place where His light cannot reach. He seemed to promise that Saudi Arabia would be a place of light for me.

Though many pitied us for having to go to the Middle East for work, it turned out to be one of the happiest times of our lives. We made many American friends and even had a baby shower when our second child was on the way.

Unfortunately, I couldn't tell any Saudis about Jesus. Any public mention of Jesus would have led to my immediate deportation. They are more frightened of Christianity there than of booze.

However, I didn't neglect meeting with other Christians. Not even a Saudi law prohibiting Christian church services kept me away.

I met many persecuted Christians

there, including the hosts of the service. They were exiled for their activities. The Saudis were able to cover that up. With the man's contract expiring, they found a convenient excuse not to renew it.

Ironically, when we decided to return to England, I didn't have any work lined up. But God spoke clearly to Kate and I, telling us to come back home. Within two weeks I had secured contracts.

I can now see God's blessing on my work and family life. But until I was without work, I didn't truly trust in Him to take care of us. Funny that I had to travel halfway around the world to learn that my Provider can meet my needs, no matter where I am.



John Watt is the President of the Chiltern Chapter of Business Men's Fellowship, located in a region near London. He is an information technology contractor, doing business as Bethany Software Limited. He and his wife, Kate, have two children. They attend Holy Trinity, which is part of the Church of England.



“The Turnaround”

THE RICHARD DeCOSTA STORY
Chico, California

I’ll never forget how awful I felt when I learned the man in our home wasn’t my real father.

Just 10 years old, I had gone to the welfare office with my mother. Officials said they had some important news. There, a man told Mom that my father had been found murdered in Los Angeles.

“No, my father’s at home on the couch,” I said. “Remember? He came home drunk.”

“We’ll talk about it later,” she frowned.

I discovered the man sleeping on the couch was my stepfather. My real father was a drug addict. He was reportedly on his way to San Francisco to see me when he was beaten to death.

“That’s it,” I declared. “I’m leaving home.”

Two days later I headed for the Mission District to live with my brother.

He was selling heroin to support his habit. Soon I became his “runner,” dropping off drug packets and collecting money.

As a teen I got more deeply involved in the drug world. Gradually, I became part of organized crime. Running drugs, beating people up and driving fine cars were all part of my daily existence.

Even after moving to the East Bay area, I made regular trips to San Francisco for drugs. That is, until an associate killed an undercover agent. The guy brought the car he had used in the crime to my place.

Not knowing what had happened, I helped break the car down into a thousand unrecognizable pieces.

Then someone in our crowd turned against us. Word leaked out that I had informed the cops about what happened. That wasn’t true, but I had to leave town. Fast. A contract called a “snitch jacket” was out on my life.

To complicate matters, by this time I had a wife and we had started a family. We moved several times, trying to settle down and get away from the insanity of drugs.

We wound up in Chico. But I hadn't run far enough. About a year after we moved here, a friend gave me some methamphetamine. It's often called "speed."

One day I got high and started hallucinating. I imagined our four-year-old daughter walking up and asking for a couple "lines" to snort. I could see our infant son asking me to roll him a marijuana cigarette.

"No, no, no," I cried. I didn't want to see my children going through the same misery I had. I grabbed my gun and went to go shoot them.

But halfway down the hallway, I suddenly stopped. (I believe God did that). Turning

around, I went back to the bedroom and fired the gun two or three times into the wall. Then I laid down on the bed.

Thinking I had killed myself, my wife called the coroner to come get the body. Instead, the police showed up. After talking for awhile, they cuffed me and took me to the mental health center.

Two days later my brother-in-law showed up and signed me out. Then he took me to his home and spent two days

telling me about Jesus. On Sunday morning, we went to church.

However, the pastor was preaching on some deep study materials. I couldn't understand a word he was saying. Halfway through the sermon, I walked to the front of the church.

There I started yelling at God. Things like, "Where are You at? Come into my life!

If You don't do something for me right now, I'm going to go out and hurt somebody!"

It was so loud the pastor stopped. As I lay face down on the altar, a huge man who had served time in the state penitentiary walked up and smacked me on the back.

"Little brother, all you have to do is say you're sorry," he said.

"Jesus, I'm (blank) sorry," I cried out in street language. Then I burst into tears. When I stopped crying, I asked the pastor if he would baptize me.

Though reluctant, my brother-in-law talked him into

doing it that night.

Something strange happened during that baptismal service. I didn't learn about it until years later. My brother-in-law said as soon as people started praying for me, the water started boiling. Then it took four men to haul me up out of the water.

I believe the devil was angry. I had spent all these years living for him. Now here I was, declaring Jesus was my Lord and Savior. Satan fought with all his power

*A contract
called a
"Snitch
Jacket"
was out on
my life.*

to stop my decision.

But the devil lost. My wife also decided to follow Jesus. We became active volunteers in our church. We are eager to go out and tell others about Christ.

Occupationally, I am unable to work. In my late teens, I had tried to go straight. I was working to become a cement mason.

But after wrapping my car about a telephone pole at 19, I broke my wrist so severely I needed three operations. Worse, I suffered head injuries that still cause occasional seizures. When I had one at work, the union made me go on medical leave.

Unfortunately, this accident was one reason I dove back into drug use. But now that I am sober, my disability gives me more time to tell others about my changed life.

I'm not the least bit shy. I walk up to strangers at a restaurant, sit down and start talking to them. I'll share about my life and ask if they know about God.

You would be amazed at how many people are receptive. Over the years I have met countless numbers of people who still use drugs. Many aren't strung out like I was, they think they're just having a little fun.

Often I will ask, "Is your life any better because of it? If you took a look at it, you will realize they haven't done a thing for you. I've been there and I know it. I had nothing left in my life until I met Christ."

One of the most dramatic encounters I had was with a machinist. He was a millionaire several times over. He came driving up to our church one day on a

motorcycle. He stopped and hopped off to ask some questions.

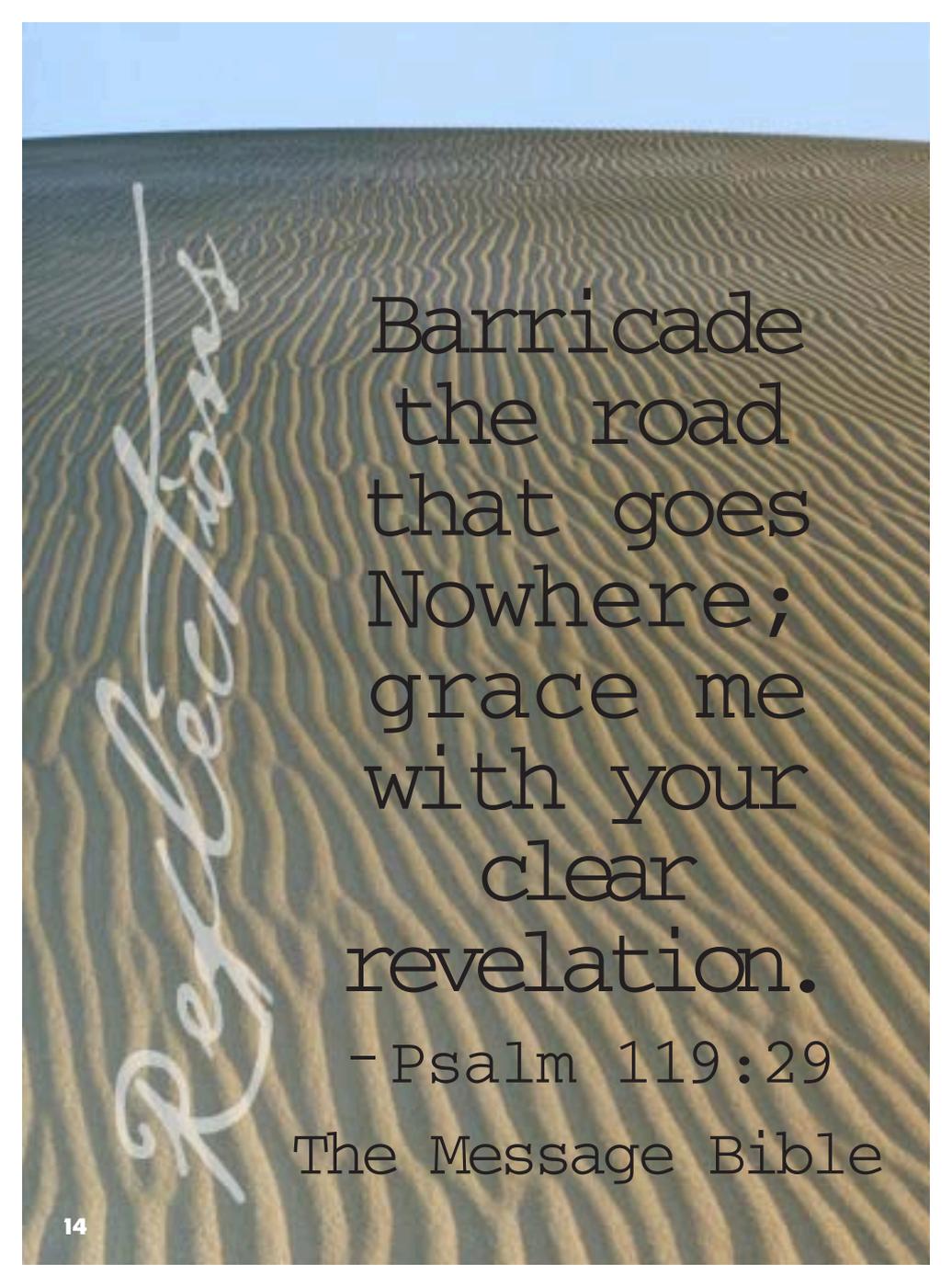
As we talked a little, it became clear he had riches but felt empty. He was snorting a lot of cocaine while his wife was spending whatever money didn't go for drugs. He made more money than he ever dreamed possible. But he had no peace.

After we taught him and his wife about the Bible, they made the same decision we had. Later, they donated a large sum of money that allowed us to renovate and expand the church. Today we have nearly three times as many people as when the church began.

This may all sound impossible. But I serve a God who makes all things possible.



Richard DeCosta and his wife, Sherry, have four children, including one they adopted in 1997. They attend Family Life Church, where is he treasurer and a board member. Richard often attends the weekly luncheon meetings of the Business Men's Fellowship chapter in Chico, where he has been a speaker.



Reflections

Barricade
the road
that goes
Nowhere;
grace me
with your
clear
revelation.

- Psalm 119:29

The Message Bible

Christ is the ANSWER...He makes life worth living.

As you have been reading the stories of the lives of different people in this issue of Answer Magazine, you may have been thinking, "Is it possible for me to really know God and have peace in my heart?"

The answer to this question is "YES!" It is experienced by believing in God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and being born-again by His Spirit.

God loves you and He showed that love in sending His Son, Jesus, to die on the Cross to pay the penalty for your sins. He wants to bless your life and make it full and complete.

He not only offers you abundant life here and now, but a life which is eternal. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

Do you want to be born-again and receive the free gift of eternal life? If you do, then follow these steps:

1. ADMIT to God that you are a sinner and are separated from Him, and that only the Lord Jesus can save you. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23)
2. REPENT by turning away from sin and submitting to God. "I tell you... except you repent, you shall all likewise perish." (Luke 13:5)
3. BELIEVE that the Lord Jesus Christ died on the Cross and shed His blood to pay the price for your sins, that He was buried

and rose again. "If you will confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and shall believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9)

4. ASK God to save you. "For whosoever shall call upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved." (Romans 10:13)

If you would like to accept Jesus into your life, and receive the free gift of eternal life, then pray this simple prayer out loud:—

"Dear God, I come to You in the Name of Jesus. I now realize that I have a choice to make about my life. I believe that Jesus died for me, shed His blood to wash away my sins, and that He rose from the dead, making a way for me to have fellowship with You. I turn my back on the life I have lived without You, and I choose to follow Jesus from this moment on. I ask Jesus to be Lord of my life and to live in my heart. I thank You, Almighty God, that You love me, have forgiven me, and have accepted me as Your child, and that right now I am a new creation, born of God. Thank You Heavenly Father."

When you have made this very important decision, please complete the form below and return it to the nearest National Service Center (listed on the back cover).

We will then send you further helpful information.

I wish to inform you of my decision to follow Jesus Christ

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Mark Bellinger
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Business Men's Fellowship, U.S.A.

3824 Buell Street, Suite A
Oakland, California 94619
Tel. 800-BMF-8981
Fax 800-BMF-9136
email: bmfusansc@aol.com
www.bmfusa.com

Business Men's Fellowship, Canada

P.O. Box 884
Grande Prairie, Alberta T8V 3Y1
Tel. 780-513-1088
Fax 780-538-1521
email: bmf_can@telusplanet.net

Business Men's Fellowship, UK

454 Crow Road, Glasgow
Scotland, UK, G11 7DR
Tel. 0141-357-0606
Fax 0141-339-2554
email: nsc@bmf-uk.com
www.bmf-uk.com



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