

Answer

Business Men's Fellowship International



Living with Aids
Bob Blackford

- **In Whom Do You Believe?** p.2
- **What? Me? Worry?** p.5
- **Is God's Grace Real?** p.8
- **Are you at the end of the line?** p.11

The Faithful Friend



As the doctor finished his examination, a frown crinkled his face. His look startled me.

When I went to see him, I had figured he could perform an operation. Or give me medication to relieve the pain crippling my neck and joints, all the way down to my toes.

“John, you have osteoarthritis,” he said. “My recommendation is to go home, sell your farm, and get a job in a place that’s warm and dry. In the meantime, I have this prescription to ease your pain.

Sell the farm? He had to be kidding! Farming was our business, our sole source of income and our identity.

Born to Mennonite parents with roots in the Amish world that shuns modern devices, I grew up plowing our family’s farm behind a team of old horses.

As the oldest son, my parents relied on me to help bring in the crops. They didn’t enroll me in school until I was 7, and then

pulled me out at age 14.

Though I enjoyed it, I didn’t care for plowing from sun-up to sunset. Or, that I could only till a single acre of land while our neighbor zipped through 10 acres on his tractor.

Sickened by my snail-like pace, after a few weeks, I told my father, “I will never plow a farm with horses for a living.”

Old-fashioned, Dad believed in hard work. But he would listen to his children. The following spring he bought a small, 28-horsepower tractor. Now I could plow 10 times as much land in less time.

Over the next few years I learned a lot. Among my lessons was the fun I could have picking up a case of beer or whiskey with friends. I would live to regret this choice.

Dad didn’t know about my drinking or he would have tried to stop it. Still, he kept me from making another serious mistake when I turned 21.

Some friends planned to migrate to western Canada to operate bigger tractors and huge combines. The lure of heading to a new frontier sounded appealing. Especially since my younger brother was now old enough to help my father.

Dad didn't like the idea. But instead of forbidding me to go, one evening he said, "I know where there's a farm for sale. I'll help you buy it so you can start farming yourself."

At the time, my main income came from laying draining tiles. Excited by the prospect of operating my own dairy farm, I readily agreed. Meanwhile, many guys who went west wound up wandering endlessly or encountering other difficulties.

Six months after I bought the farm, I married my longtime girlfriend. Settling down, we soon had the first of our three children.

However, this didn't mean perfect happiness. The taste for alcohol I had developed as a teenager came back to haunt me.

Raised in a Christian home, at 17 I had joined the church. I acknowledged that Jesus was the Son of God and had died for my mistakes. I pledged to follow Him and make Him Lord of my life.

Trouble is, I never realized this was a serious commitment that included changing the way I lived. So I continued drinking – after all, it was just some guys having fun, right?

Even though I wasn't running around with them any more, every time I went into town to pick up supplies or go to the bank, a friend invited me to stop by a bar. Like a helpless lamb, I went along and came home drunk.

Naturally, this upset my wife. Finally, she started nagging: "I want you to come home as soon as you're done doing business."

"I promise I'll come straight home," I would say. Although I meant it, I was never strong enough to resist.

This went on for three years. I couldn't stop, despite going to church and renewing my vow to live a Christian life.

Finally, one night after another round of drinking, I got down on my knees at home.

"Lord Jesus, I know You're for real," I said. "You

know that I've tried on my own to stop drinking. I have failed. I need Your help and I need it now."

For the next two weeks I didn't touch a drop of booze. I never went to town and none of my friends stopped by with a bottle. I never even thought of having a drink.

One day as I walked into the barn at lunchtime, I thought, "Boy, I'm thirsty. I think I'll grab a cold beer."

Suddenly Jesus spoke. I didn't hear a voice, yet I could hear a clear message.

"It's been two weeks and you haven't had a drink. What happened?"

*I went
along
and came
home
drunk.*

In a flash, I realized God had answered my prayer. I didn't need to wander back down that destructive path.

Jumping up and down as I ran toward the house, I exclaimed, "I've been delivered! I've been delivered!"

Now many years later, I've never had another drink. However, I have faced many obstacles, starting with the crippling arthritis that threatened my career.

After coming home, I told my wife and her brother about the doctor's gloomy announcement.

I had been taking vitamin and mineral tablets for about a year; my brother-in-law had sold them to me.

"Have you ever thought about taking more of the supplement?" he asked.

"I'll only be too glad to try," I replied. "I can't sleep at night because of the pain."

Doubling the dose, within six weeks I started feeling better. From there I steadily improved. I credit that supplement and prayer for my healing.

Yet a bigger test awaited me the following year. A few days before Christmas, a freak accident in our barn electrocuted 12 cows and a bull. That was two-thirds of our herd.

"John, you better check your insurance," a neighbor said. "If that happened in my barn, there wouldn't be coverage for it."

I checked. Sure enough, our policy didn't cover it.

The next day as I milked our remaining cows, a sinister voice whispered, "Look, how you have it now, John. You're worse off than you ever had it before."

Anger surged within me. I recognized the devil was trying to upset me.

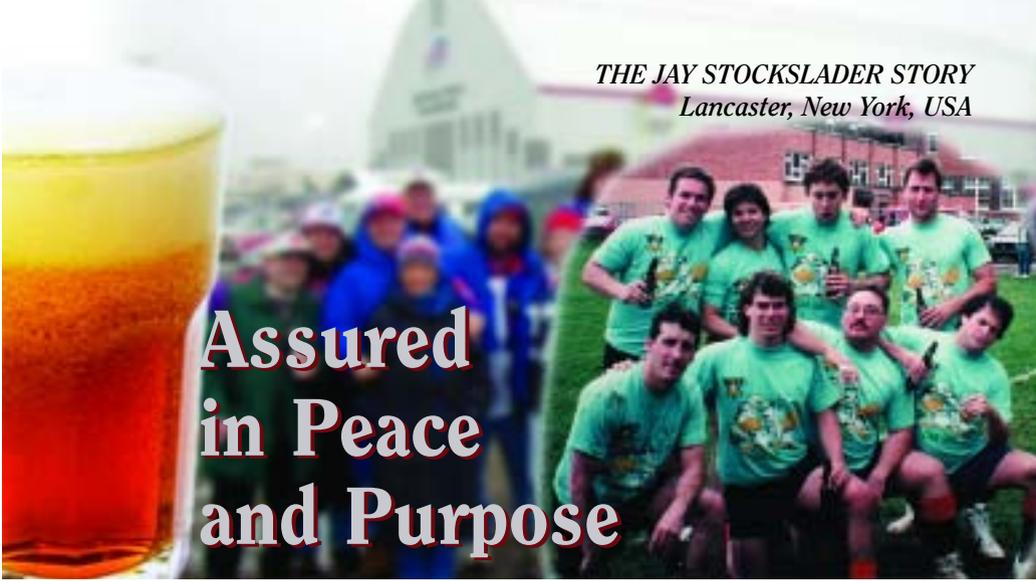
"Get behind me, Satan!" I declared. "I know Who I believe in. And I know that He is able to take care of me and my family."

That was true. We struggled, but the next year were able to buy a new farm. I knew God was behind this plan when we went to arrange financing and the bank wanted to loan us more money than we needed!

I shouldn't have been surprised. The same God who helped me stop drinking and healed me so I could continue farming cared about this situation, too. Throughout my life He has shown Himself faithful.



John Kuepfer has since sold his dairy farm to his son and now markets seeds to farmers in his area of southern Ontario. He also drives a school bus. John is the President of the Listowel, Ontario Chapter of BMF. He and his wife, Kathleen, have three children and six grandchildren. They attend Listowel Community Church.



Assured in Peace and Purpose

As snow flurries swirled around us, I tugged on my gloves and turned my back against the wind. This day marked the coldest weather ever for a National Football League playoff game. But nothing would keep me away from my beloved Buffalo Bills -- or the pre-game tailgate party!

“Hey, Jay, want another beer?” called one of my buddies.

“Yeah, man, maybe it’ll chase away the chill,” I laughed.

Another weekend. Another party. Another game. Come Monday it would be back to the office.

But I didn’t mind this routine. I liked to work hard and on the weekends I liked to have fun.

“Happy-go-lucky Jay.” With a great sense of humor and a fun-loving spirit, I had a reputation as the college kid who never grew up.

But underneath it lay a troubled person. Worry plagued me. I stewed over everything, from whether I was earning enough money to how things would turn out in life.

When my wife, Christine, and I were dating, she told someone at a party, “If Jay doesn’t have anything to worry about, he’ll think up something.”

Where this habit came from remains a mystery. But I developed it as a youngster.

My most vivid memory of this fretting goes back to age 7. That year my parents purchased a new car. I rode with them into the country so they could show it to my oldest brother, who was 24.

Suddenly my father motioned to Mom.

“Looks like the gas tank is running low,” he said. “We’ll need to find a station pretty soon.”

Although we were just on a country road, to me it looked like the wilderness.

Fear washed over me. I panicked at the thought of being stranded in the middle of nowhere.

“Please God,” I whispered as I curled in a ball on the back seat floor. “We need gas. There needs to be a gas station.”

Soon, we came to one and filled the tank. An answer to prayer? I don’t remember what I thought. Nor did that stop me from continual worry.

Ironically, many people never knew the truth. Seeing me laughing, joking and cutting up, they assumed everything was fine.

To a certain extent, it was. The youngest of five children, I grew up 90 minutes away in Rochester, the home of Eastman Kodak. Dad worked for the company for 40 years before retiring while I was still in high school.

My parents weren’t overly affectionate, yet we knew we were loved. Raised to be responsible and do the right thing, after graduation I set out for Syracuse University.

In college, I developed my taste for alcohol as captain of the rugby club, a gang of rough, tough, hard-drinking athletes.

I also visited plenty of bars. Somehow, I managed to avoid serious trouble. I never got too wild or developed the kind of alcohol problems that plagued a couple of my uncles.

Yet, the bar scene and tailgating remained a part of my life throughout my 20s-- until I turned 29. After dating for

seven years, I decided it was time to settle down with Christine.

Looking back, I describe my life then as a train going nowhere. While I held a good job with a local school system, I lacked purpose and direction.

However, this started to change about 18 months into our marriage. We learned that my wife was expecting our first child. Suddenly the church life I had known growing up, but walked away from, took on renewed importance.

Two of Christine’s older sisters also influenced our decision to look for a church. I admired and respected them and their polite, well-behaved children. They told us the reason for their successful family life was God.

Well, I had always heard about God, but I knew little about Him. To me, church meant slipping into a pew, kneeling to say a few

prayers, and heading for the door.

But after visiting several over two years, we settled on the church we now attend. And it was there, on Fathers’ Day 1996, that I had an encounter with the Holy Spirit that changed my life.

During the opening music, as I held our then 10-month-old daughter, I felt overwhelmed at what a blessing she and Christine were. To meet the responsibility of caring for them, I knew I needed the power of God and Jesus Christ in my life. I could hardly wait to make that decision public.

*I lacked
purpose
and
direction.*

I don't remember a thing the pastor said that day. But after his talk, he asked those who wanted to follow Christ to stand up and walk forward. Leaping from my seat, I almost ran to the front.

(Later, I learned that Christine – who had decided to become a Christian the previous fall – had been praying I would respond.)

At the front, I prayed, “God, You are Lord. I believe You sent Jesus to die for my sins. I need to wake up every day and say that you are Lord.”

Wow! What a difference God made in my life! Especially by taking away that burden of constantly worrying.

It wasn't just personal issues that used to trouble me. Details at work can drive you up the wall if you let them.

Since I was able to trust God to reward my diligence, I stopped bugging co-workers to make sure everything got done on time.

One thing that helped me develop more faith was studying the Bible. One of the first verses I learned was Psalm 46:10: “Be still and know that I am God.”

Those few words speak volumes to me. I think of life now as driving a car, but with God holding the steering wheel in His hands. While I still have a job to do, ultimately He controls the outcome.

That is especially helpful to remember in dealing with the challenge of raising children. God guides us through that task while simultaneously helping Christine and me with our marriage.

After Lydia's birth, we prayed about having another child. This time we wanted a boy. But no child came for nearly two years. God used this time to help us get to know each other better and learn how to

pray together. Finally, nearly three years after Lydia's birth, Christine gave birth to twin sons.

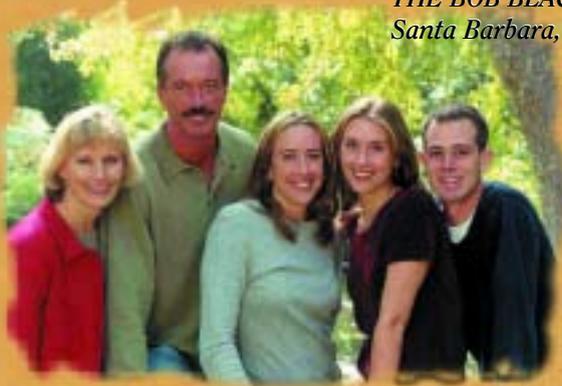
God uses our children to teach me love, patience, and to view life in a positive way. He has helped me see what a gift my wife is, too. I always thought she would be a good wife and mother, but she has surpassed my expectations.

Knowing such joy in my family helps me maintain a balance between work and home. I don't have to be a workaholic and constantly strive for more if I find contentment in what I have.

Knowing that God will bless me as I seek Him first is the best prescription for peace that I have ever discovered.



The Director of Continuing Education at Niagara University near Niagara Falls, New York, Jay Stockslader is a member of BMF's Greater Buffalo Chapter. He and his wife, Christine, have three children. They attend Resurrection Life Fellowship in Cheektowaga, where he directs the multimedia ministry



Living with Aids

Tossing the mail onto the table, I quickly scanned the stack. One piece stood out. The handwritten envelope bore my full name but no return address. I couldn't ignore it.

When I opened it and saw the letterhead, chills shot down my spine: Santa Barbara Blood Bank.

"There were some irregularities found in your last blood donation," the note began. "Please call our office...to set up an appointment to discuss the results."

Instantly, it felt like all the blood rushed from my head. I grabbed the table to steady myself. I knew exactly what this meant: I had AIDS.

This awkward, painful reality originated with a homosexual relationship that began five years earlier. In reality, the roots of this situation extended back to childhood.

For years I lacked any sense of identity because of a weak, emotionally-distant

father. Dad never knew how to assert himself, since his father had deserted the family when Dad was a pre-schooler.

As a boy, I accepted my mother as the dominant figure in our home. But late in my teens, a mysterious desire surfaced for close, same-sex relationships.

These conflicting feelings raged even though I was dating Joanne, a beautiful girl I met in my sophomore year of high school. They continued after I vowed to follow Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior.

The latter decision took place after the leaders in a Christian student organization convinced me that Jesus was the Son of God. They persuaded me that believing in Christ was the only way to enter heaven.

Despite this new start in life, I still couldn't shake these nagging desires. Privately, and earnestly, I prayed that God would remove those feelings and leave only healthy, heterosexual ones.

After several years, I decided that marrying Joanne would work. Marriage would resolve all doubts about my manhood and my ability to make it in the world. I was determined to get past inner turmoil one way or another. If God wouldn't change me, I would change myself.

After Joanne and I graduated from college, I attended seminary. After graduation I worked for several years at a church, then moved to Santa Barbara. There I joined the staff of the campus organization that had led to me becoming a Christian.

On the surface, I looked happy and well-adjusted. However, a few years after the birth of our second daughter, I attempted to resolve my continuing conflict through an intimate relationship with another man.

My long, dark detour into homosexuality – while a role model to our children and dozens of teenagers – is ugly. By opening this sexual Pandora's Box, I reaped shame and heartache.

Although my first relationship ended after three years, others would follow. As a result, I lived with a lack of authority. I couldn't speak truth into others' lives.

I doubted whether I would live with God when I departed from this earth. Heaven took on a surreal image. I saw it as a darkened theater. Although God let me in, I had to sit in the back row with other heathens. As I watched, friends joined Jesus on the well-lit stage.

My journey out of despair was like climbing a steep set of stairs. Each step proved difficult, but took me closer to hope. There were five in all:

First, I told Joanne the **truth**. Shattered, she lived with feelings of anger, fear and betrayal. Though she had grounds for divorce, ultimately she forgave me. She wanted to restore our marriage instead of breaking it up and creating more bitterness.

Next, I had to recognize **my brokenness**. I couldn't "fix" my homosexual desires. To find help, I had to reveal the truth I wanted to hide until my death. Each time I confessed, I felt more naked and vulnerable.

The third step took longer. It was an old-fashioned remedy known as **repentance**. I had to turn away from the past and burn bridges with old friends. And I had to reveal to new friends my fear of rejection.

Next came receiving **forgiveness**. That was a huge step for someone filled with shame and guilt. Yet, others' love and acceptance showed me that this was an obligation. I had to accept the grace they offered.

That led to the final level: **freedom**. I was freed from compulsive thoughts and behavior, shame and guilt. I found freedom to love Joanne in ways that surprised both of us. A new tenderness emerged between us.

It took 18 months to make the transition, but after my HIV diagnosis, I recognized I had to leave ministry. After several interviews, I secured a sales position

A blue square with a gold border containing the text: " ...she forgave me."

with a major life insurance company.

After in-house training, I set out on a career that called for strength and fortitude. You haven't lived until you've lived on commission-only income!

Yet, in business I made an amazing discovery. For years, I thought the only place I could minister was with a church or Christian organization. Now, I saw that God could use me anywhere.

This became evident when a fellow trainee came down with cancer. I was able to tell him about Christ. Before dying, he prayed with me and invited Jesus to be his Lord and Savior.

Eventually, I would share my faith with all our agents and office staff and a number of clients. Not everyone was open to my message, but they respected my beliefs.

As I progressed up the ladder to sales manager, I earned certification as a financial planner. Now selling securities and investments, I also helped people plan for the future.

While no one other than Joanne and a few close friends knew of my illness, the prospect that I might die at any time gave me a passion for my job. I would often tell clients or prospective customers, "You don't know what will happen to you in the future." Because of my condition, I knew that was the truth.

I wanted to help people prepare for the possibility of unforeseen adversity and help them clarify what really mattered. I loved talking with people about the most important things in life and why they wanted to protect them.

As much as I loved this work, I eventually had to resign. Though God protected me from major AIDS symptoms, I

finally became too weak to make it through the day.

At first, my superiors told employees I was taking a leave of absence. But after three months, I wrote a letter telling everyone the truth about my departure. I was amazed at their gracious responses.

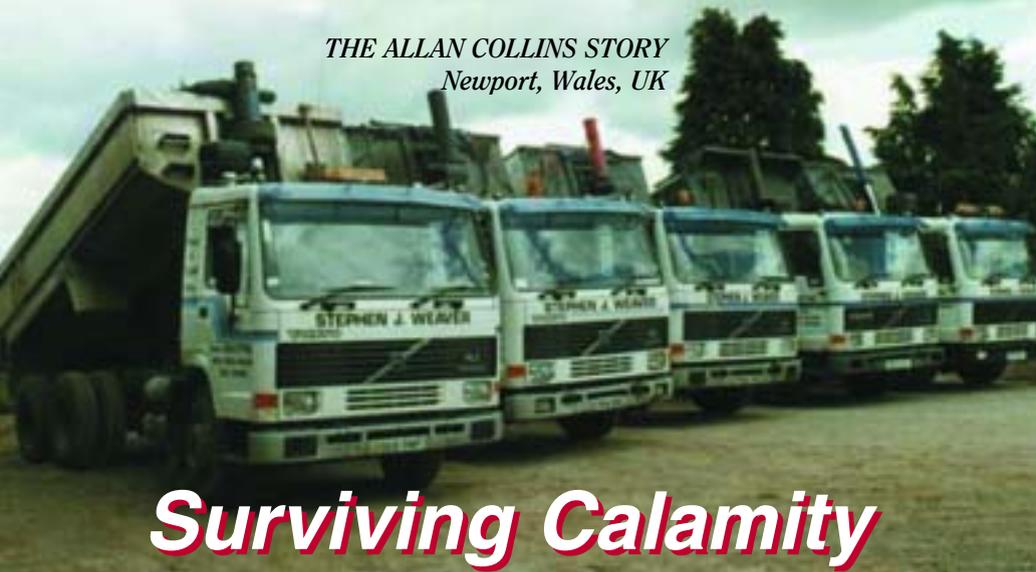
Although AIDS once felt like living with a death sentence, I now believe God will keep me going for as long as He needs me to tell others about His amazing love.

His grace is real, and it is sufficient.

No matter what you have done or what struggles you have, Jesus is waiting to set you free. All you have to do is call upon His Name.



Although disabled, Bob Blackford still conducts periodic financial planning and insurance seminars. Bob and his wife, Joanne, have two daughters and two grandchildren. They attend Vineyard Christian Fellowship in Goleta, California. For more information on Bob, including how to obtain a book about his life, go to www.settingfree.com or e-mail: settingfree@juno.com.



Surviving Calamity

A tough guy. That's me. A steelworker for 20 years, I left the mill to drive a 30-ton excavator at a waste disposal site. Manning the controls, I pushed mounds of rubbish into the ground, then covered it with dirt.

That is, until my life changed forever in August of 1998.

It happened the day our banksman called in sick and the foreman asked me to fill in for him. A banksman supervises lorries (trucks) coming onto the tip (scale) before they dump their loads of waste.

My duties this day included controlling the lorries lined up in a queue. I kept them from getting stacked up too tightly or breaking out of line.

Five were in position when one driver thought, "I'm not waiting in this queue" and backed up.

Unfortunately, I was standing right behind him. Without any warning, his lorry thumped me to the ground like a bag of

cement dropped from the top of a water tower!

Looking up in terror, I saw the lowest part of his engine coming toward me. Grabbing the handbrake cables underneath, I gritted my teeth as I rattled along the ground.

"Hey, watch what you're doing!" screamed several men at the driver. "You just ran over Alan!"

Panicking, the driver pulled forward. That smashed my ribs. Finally, he threw the lorry into park and ran off the tip.

He wasn't just frightened about me. He faced trouble for driving without a license. It was a serious offense, considering the vehicle carried 5 1/2 tons of hard-core stone and conifer.

Meanwhile, I wondered: Is this the end of the line?

A buzzing crowd gathered around me as I lay on the ground, grinding my teeth in pain.

“Leave him alone!” screamed several men when one reached out to offer help. “Wait until the ambulance comes!”

Yet, as I lay there flat, a voice whispered, “Get up.”

I ignored it. The pain was so intense. I had never been knocked down in my life.

“Get up,” I heard again.

The third time, I decided to try. I moved one leg. Then the other. Finally, I stood up.

Suddenly, I started turning like a top, round and round in circles. Later, some men told me I looked like a dog chasing its tail. Finally, I collapsed.

Soon after, the ambulance arrived and took me to the hospital. There, a student doctor (who got in trouble for not even sending me for an X-ray) gave me a painkiller and sent me home.

After a night of agony, I returned to the hospital. This time they X-rayed me. A doctor brought me the bad news.

“You have broken ribs and both shoulders are dislocated,” he said. “Your back is fractured and you have damage to your legs and ankles.”

I didn’t think I would ever be the same. As I lay there in the hospital, I wondered if I was destined to spend the rest of my days in a wheelchair. But God had other plans.

Several years before this, I had decided to follow Jesus as my Lord and Savior. Now, I wasn’t a bad guy. I only drank in

moderation. Never gambled. Had never been in any trouble. My only vice was a heavy cigarette habit.

I also loved to go fishing. Most Sunday mornings found me on the lake with a group of my mates.

However, one Sunday the wind blew up and I came home before noon. My wife, Val, was at church. Not having anything else planned, I decided to join her.

When I arrived, the padre waved me inside. I sat down next to Val. Afterwards, she told me, “We’re going to a meeting on Saturday night at the George Street warehouse – Richard’s place.” “What’s that?” I asked. “It’s a carpet warehouse where they praise and worship.”

“That’s a funny place to praise and worship,” I thought, but agreed to go.

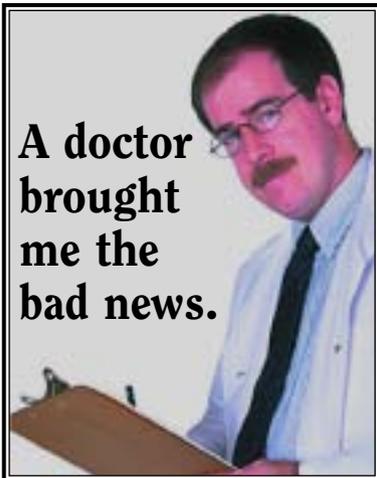
I didn’t know what I had gotten myself into. The warehouse was owned by

Richard Shepherd, the leader of Business Men’s Fellowship in Wales.

That night an American chap named Frank Evans was speaking. Evans talked about a God who loved us and sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die for us.

He described a Lord I had never heard about. A God who cares deeply for us and wants to be involved in every detail of our lives.

Afterwards, the speaker invited people who needed prayer to come to the front. Val walked forward. So did dozens of people from all over the warehouse.



“I’m not going!” I declared silently.

Suddenly, I felt a nudge. It was so hard I turned around to see who pushed me. No one was there!

The next thing I knew, I was standing next to Val.

“This is your husband, isn’t it?” Evans asked, smiling.

“Yes,” she replied.

While I never dreamed this would happen, I agreed that I needed Jesus. Bowing my head, I said a prayer acknowledging that He was the Son of God. I asked forgiveness for my sin and promised to turn away from it.

That prayer assured me that God knew me and had a plan for my life. This realization became a key to helping survive 18 months of recuperation from my accident.

Sometimes, miracles happen slowly. That’s what took place. Gradually I recovered. I knew my healing was complete the Friday night I attended a meeting at Richard’s house.

A close friend named Graham prayed for my shoulder. Although able to get around, I could still only raise one hand in the air.

Suddenly, Graham said, “Look, Alan, you can raise both hands!”

I opened my eyes. Sure enough, without even realizing it, I had both hands in the air. I laughed in amazement.

One other story about answered prayer is worth telling. The afternoon of my accident, Val was standing at the kitchen sink.

Without warning, a strange feeling overcame her. She describes it as a “bumpety bump” from God. Not knowing what was happening at that moment, she prayed for

me, for our family and our friends.

After she pleaded for God’s protection over all of us, Val had a sense of peace and calm. Whatever was happening, she knew everyone would be all right.

Soon after, someone from the tip called her to tell her about the accident. When our youngest son, Mark, came to take her to the hospital, he was crying.

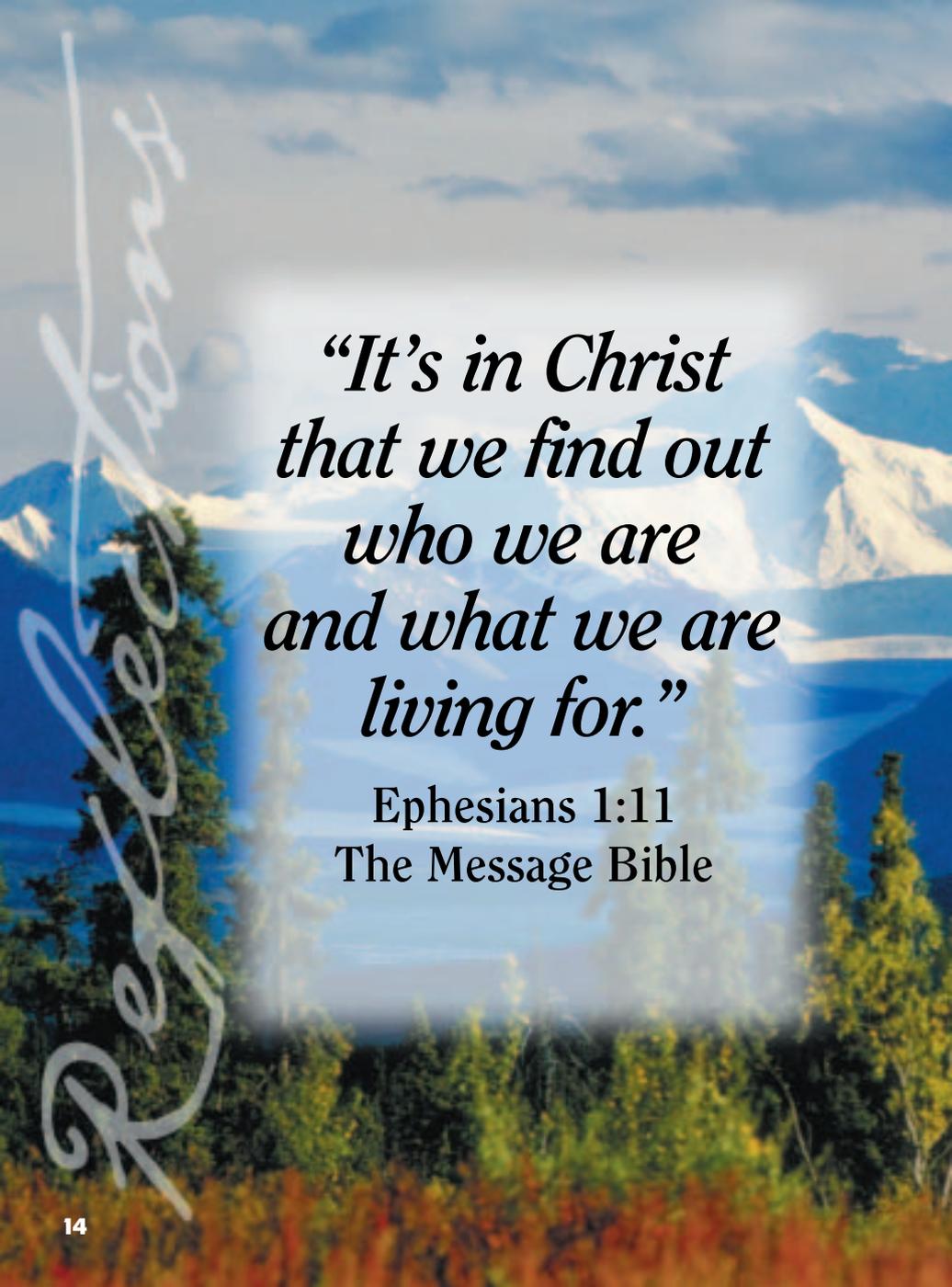
“Don’t worry,” she soothed. “Dad’s going to be all right.”

She hit the nail on the head. It wasn’t the easiest road to travel and I still wish that it hadn’t happened. But adversity strikes every life, rich or poor, young or old. When it does, it helps to know the One who is Lord over all.

With Jesus by your side, you have nothing to fear.



Alan Collins had to take early retirement because of his injuries, but still likes to fish. He is an active member of the Newport Chapter of BMF. He and his wife, Val, have two sons and three grandchildren. They attend Bethel Community Church.



*“It’s in Christ
that we find out
who we are
and what we are
living for.”*

Ephesians 1:11
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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