

## CHAPTER TEN

### NOTES FROM THE AUTHOR

*“Each day is a special gift from God, with it brings joy and suffering. Each day is a test of our faith; For God will judge everyone’s work, including every secret thing.”* —Laura Whitley

No one forgets the day they acknowledge their belief in the Lord Jesus Christ. This day marks our eternal salvation and the beginning of our race of faith; therefore, it is an extremely important day of our lives. I remember this day as if it was yesterday. I was fifteen years old and had been involved in a volleyball team during the summer at a Methodist Church that my cousin attended. My parents raised me in the Catholic religion, and I attended Catholic school along with my three brothers for several years. But that year, when I turned fifteen, my father took us out of the Catholic Church completely. My father had a burning desire to know the Lord, and began to read and study the Bible on his own for the first time.

The Catholic Church affirms that they have been given the authority to bind or loose here on earth. Therefore, the priests believe that they have the authority to hear from its parishioners the confession of sins, to forgive sins and be the ones to teach doctrine that stems from Roman Catholic tradition. Thereby, they repress and do not promote the individual study of the Word of God. But when my father began to study the Word, God opened up his eyes to many truths that were in opposition to what the Catholic Church taught and the practices they engaged in. The Roman Catholic Church has no Scriptural grounds for its practices, such as the power to forgive sins, the worship and praying to Mary or to dead saints, the sign of the cross, the chanting of prayers, the requirement of the mass and sacraments necessary for salvation and other false practices passed down by the traditions of men. All of this originated in 1870 when Pope Pius the Ninth changed the criteria for tradition. The tradition before that time was that it would be in complete agreement with Scripture. But at the first Vatican Council, Pope Pius the Ninth declared the doctrine of papal infallibility; which is that the Pope possesses full and complete power and authority over the whole Church, that he can rule independently

on any Church matter and that there is no higher authority on earth than the Pope. So the Roman Catholic Church recognized the Bible, the Pope and their church tradition as equal in authority for faith and doctrine.

Only by the grace of God was my father able to separate himself from this false religion and be led to the truth. And God gave him the strength to stand up against many of his family members who rejected his decision, cursed him and disassociated themselves from him.

So, at this particular time, I was invited to go to a Church camp with the volleyball team from this Methodist Church. It was the summer of 1979. I accepted, excited that I was going on a trip away from home with my friends. I was glad to get away, as I was, and as most teenagers are at this age, difficult and troubled. I am sure my parents felt the same about my week's departure. We were going in well-accommodated air conditioned buses to Sacramento, California from South Texas.

This in itself was very inviting and if you have ever been to South Texas (next to the border of Mexico) in the summer you know what I'm talking about. The average climate there is 95 degrees with 100% humidity. Going to the mountains in northern California where it is cool and scenic seemed like a much better place to be! I had already pictured in my mind that it would be a week full of play and adventure. The arrival proved to be of no disappointment. The setting was just beautiful, with rustic cabins surrounded by mountains and pine trees. The air was crisp and cool with the scent of pine and green grass within the campground. It was breathtaking!

As we got settled in, we were given an agenda of the activities for the week. As I read it, I was surprised to read that we had a tight schedule that included Bible study, fellowship, Church service, volleyball and adventure. Although I was not expecting this agenda, I was curious and interested in what it was all about. They had previously told us to bring our Bibles for the trip, and this was peculiar to me coming from the Catholic Church, but I didn't question it.

My mother had bought me a small Bible a few months before when I was being a bit rebellious (ok, quite a bit) and she had circled certain verses she wanted me to read — particularly those that commanded we be honorable to our parents and to be clean and holy (I still have this Bible). So I was prepared with my Bible in hand and had already decided that I

would keep an open mind. To my surprise, I was very interested in all that I was being taught. We would separate in small groups to study God's Word. Throughout the week, we had two Church services scheduled; one on Wednesday and one on Saturday night, and then we were scheduled to leave on Sunday morning. The week was just an unbelievable God-given time for me. God had a perfect plan for my life — of course, totally different than what I had planned.

At the end of the week after much study, worship and fellowship, we were preparing to return and it was time for the last service on Saturday evening. I walked inside the quaint little wooden Church in the center of the campground, the lights were very dim and they had candles burning down the aisles and in the front altar. My high school friend was up front playing soothing Christian music on the piano and singing softly as we all entered. We sang songs and the pastor spoke for about forty-five minutes. As he was speaking, I became emotional, with the feeling of butterflies in my stomach.

When the pastor had finished his speech, he made a request for those who had not, but wanted to acknowledge their belief in the Lord Jesus Christ to come up to the front to pray. Many got up and walked to the front and again my friend began to play the piano and sing. My heart began to pump very fast; I knew I wanted to commit my life to the Lord. At this very moment, I acknowledged my belief in the Lord. I got up and began to walk to the front. Many others were walking up. The little Church was filled with so much emotion and I could feel the power of the Holy Spirit at work that evening. As my friend played the piano, she began to weep and her voice began to crack as she could no longer sing. We all cried. I had never done so much of it in my life! I prayed to the Lord, asking forgiveness for my past sins. I prayed that the Lord would forgive my rebellious acts towards my parents. I prayed that He would forgive all my past actions and conduct. I was a completely different person that night as I allowed the Spirit of the Lord to be active through me.

When I arrived back home, everyone noticed a big change in me. My father had us attend an "Assembly of God" Church with Pastor Bowen, who we all called "Brother Bowen." I was active in the Church and at times would get up to sing to the Lord. I was an avid reader of the Word, though I only read certain verses that helped me through my circumstances. I never did actually *study* the Word. Needless to say, I fell in and out of God's Word for several years after that. I attended different

Churches, and at one time, went back to the Catholic Church for a while. There was always a question in my mind lingering on and on that I never got answered.

When I attended service, I noticed the messages were the same — a historical account of the Bible, but never the purpose. My question was, *“I am saved, now what? There has to be more than this. What is my purpose in life?”* Since there was no understanding of my purpose in Christ, no foundation to build upon and no hope, my ways continued with that of the world and I was blinded and carnal just as most other Christians. My life was a mess without God, but at the time I didn’t realize it. My choices were extremely bad and my actions worse. I made poor choices in my relationships but I still put my strongest efforts in them, whereas my relationship with Christ was nonexistent. I didn’t pray or read anymore. My spirit was dormant. But God was there for me, always granting me a wake-up call.

I was twenty-three years old, divorced and in another disastrous relationship; and I was living with my parents at the time. I was accompanying my boyfriend to a conference that he was attending in Houston. When he came in to greet my parents, we were busy talking together and I could see in his face a sense of urgency. I figured we had time since the airport I thought we were leaving from was only ten minutes away. When we got in his car to leave his face was red and he exploded in anger, hurling cutting remarks at me for making him late to the airport. It turned out that it was another airport that we were leaving from, which was an hour away. At this point, it would have been impossible to have made it in time. But he was relentless to try and make it; a completely different person came over him at that moment.

I lived out in the country at the time so the roads were two-way, narrow and curvy. His temperament forced his foot to hit the gas pedal to the floor. I looked over at the speedometer to see we were going 120 miles per hour. I grabbed the top right handle above the door and held on to it tightly. We were coming up to a big curve and it was then that he began to lose control of the car. As the car veered to the left side, I noticed a truck coming in our direction. Immediately I shouted, *“We’re going to crash!”* I had never in all my life been so petrified. In my mind, I could see the newspaper headlines the next day: *“Texas couple perishes in car accident.”* Everything happened so fast.

My boyfriend attempted to move back to the right lane, but we nipped the oncoming truck, just enough to take us directly into a ditch, setting the motion for the car to turn over and over and over — sideways. Each time we turned over, I would see light and then I would see darkness. We must have turned over five times. Sobbing, I cried out to the Lord, “*Please God, help me!*” “*Please, God, Please!*” It seemed like only a matter of seconds and then it was over. Did I tell you we didn’t have our seat belts on? The car landed upside down in a field. I was thrown to the back halfway in and halfway out of the vehicle and I was unconscious. My boyfriend got thrown out of the car from his side. He awoke first and was calling my name. He pulled me out of the vehicle and I awoke. I had no shoes on, my hose and clothes were ripped and I had glass engrained on my skin all over. But I had no broken bones. My boyfriend broke his collar bone and nothing else. We walked out of their alive and with no major injuries! We were taken to the hospital in an ambulance to be treated for minor injuries.

A week later, we went to see the vehicle at the junkyard. I couldn’t believe my eyes. The owner of the junkyard asked us who had died in that car! We told him that we were the ones who were in it. The right passenger side where I was sitting was completely mashed in and if I would have had my seat belt on, I would certainly have died. It was a miracle from God that we lived. God was not ready for me to go — He had other plans for me. While I was standing there looking at what was left of the vehicle, I said a prayer of thanks to God for saving me. I told myself I would never forget this experience as long as I live. God had truly answered my prayer. That should have been a wake-up call for me. I should have at that point re-dedicated my life to God and chose to go His way. Instead, I again chose the wrong path, the path that leads to destruction.

God loves us so much and wants all of us to know Him and His purpose for us that He attempts to get our attention by “cornering” us. His purpose is to get us to stop going our own carnal direction, according to our own self-centered ways and begin to live His way. Our way produces death in the age to come and His way produces life in the age to come. He is telling us to please choose *His* way.

But for the next fourteen years, I was living according to the flesh and the world. The cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches took all of my time. I had no time left for God. I was twenty-seven years old when I

started an employment service company. God blessed the business for ten years and then just when competition sky-rocketed, God blessed me with a buyer for my business. But pride and self-centeredness got in the way of giving thanks to God for my blessings and glorifying Him through it all. And it was at this point in time when God decided to give me another wake-up call.

After the business sold in 1999, I took on the task of building my “dream home” and sub-contracting it myself. Eight months later, I finished a 6,700 square foot house and moved in. My parents moved in with me while they were in the process of having their home built. I was working as an independent contractor doing outside sales and felt very content with my life. And then six months later, a bomb hit right on top of me. My second divorcee (the one with the car accident) was suing me for child custody for the reason, and I quote, that he “*wanted to make my life miserable.*” Then, to make matters worse, he enticed my first husband to do the same. So he did. I was going to two court trials for almost two years. Because of this, I had no money. Then, I lost my job and was about to lose my house. I had my house up for sale hoping that it would sell fast. Then, I lost both custody battles. Though the orders stated joint custody, the primary residence would be with the fathers. I was devastated. The day that I packed both my sons clothes and saw them go was the pointed end. That evening I attempted suicide.

But God was not ready for me to depart. It was merely a wake-up call. My body did not accept the thirty sleeping pills that I consumed and I vomited profusely for over an hour. I ended up at the hospital around two in the morning still awake and my heart still pumping. The next day while I was at home alone, I remembered my Lord. I found myself sobbing again to Him. Desperate, I humbly got on my knees in the middle of the living room and I prayed. I cried out to Him,

*“Lord, please forgive me for abandoning you and please forgive me for my past faults. If you hear me, and you care for me, then please, please, help me. Help me with the pain in my heart. Help me to start anew. Lord, if you do this, I promise to give You the rest of my life to do Your will. Please, God, please!”*

Two days later I had scheduled an open house. Several couples came by and that evening I received four offers to buy! It was a miracle from God. I found a job with a local phone book company as an outside salesperson

and made new friends within the company. About a month later, my work friends invited me to lunch at Chili's Restaurant, secretly setting me up with a client of theirs. When I arrived there were about eight of us and seated directly across from me was their client. The moment I saw him, I knew God had sent me my "soul-mate." Six months later (I was thirty-seven years old) we were married and we are in our twelfth year of marriage to date.

I started my life anew and I never looked back. God answered my prayer almost immediately. He opened my eyes to the destructive life I was leading. But he had to bring me to my knees first. He had to allow these painful hurdles in my life so that I would finally call on him for help. All pride and self-centeredness had to be put away. And when I was stripped of it, I became the person that He wanted me to be. And not only me, but many Christians. In the future, we know that the Lord will bring Israel to their knees and they will call on God for help. Only then, will God hear them and answer them. Only then, will He restore them.

My husband and I moved into a house, went to a Baptist Church on Sundays and started Bible studies in our home. We had a son of our own and continued going to Church and having Bible studies. Everything seemed wonderful and this time I always gave thanks to God for His blessings. But deep in my heart, something was missing. I kept going back to the question I had when I first got saved, twenty-three years ago, which was *"I'm saved, now what?"* *"There has to be more than this."* *"What is my purpose in this life?"*

One day two of my closest friends (her and her husband) with whom I went to high school with and who were attending our Bible studies, invited my husband and I to their Baptist Church. They had met a Bible teacher and former pastor who they invited to teach at their Church and they wanted us to hear him speak. They were also thinking about having him start a weekly Bible study at their home. So we went. He seemed to be very informed in the Word of God. So we began going to the bible studies at their home. At first, I didn't understand the message that he was teaching. I told my husband that I was having a difficult time understanding and that we should probably stop going. But he told me to give it more time and to pray about it. So I did. I prayed, asking the Lord for the understanding of His message. The next Sunday during Bible study, I understood *everything* that he was teaching! It was as if the Lord opened my eyes and gave me full understanding. Because I had a strong

desire to know His Word and my purpose in this life, He answered my prayer. From that day forward, I was passionate about growing in His Word, so I began to study on my own and to read books (alongside the Word) that the pastor-teacher suggested. Shortly after, we scheduled a baptism in our backyard pool and my husband, I, and our sons re-committed our lives to God for the salvation of our souls. This was in 2005. We moved the Bible studies to our home and we have been growing in the Word and learning to be hearers and doers of the Word ever since. I am so thankful to my husband for not allowing us to quit going to the Bible studies! And every day I am so thankful to God for giving me the greatest gift of all--the understanding of His Word and His promise of SO GREAT A SALVATION!

I give thanks to God for blessing me with such a wonderful family — my husband, Noble; my four sons: Troy (his wife, Lauren), Bryan, Jacob and Cody; my parents, Leo and Velia Acosta; my Cornerstone Church family, John and Ann Herbert and my brothers and sisters in Christ, especially those of “the faith.” I also thank God for Charles Strong, for placing him in my path to bring me the Gospel of Glory, the Word of the Kingdom, which is the Truth of the Word of God. I pray that we all may be with one mind and one mouth glorifying our God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ until He returns. Praise to our Lord forever!

In the hope of His glory,

— Laura Whitley