



**AS I HAVE
LOVED YOU**

by Ron Decuir

AS I HAVE LOVED YOU

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1

It was a day like all days for Randy Whitaker as he sat in the prison cafeteria picking at his breakfast. The clamor of the other prisoners, and the rattle of plates on the stainless steel tables all but drowned out the voice of a war correspondent that was speaking from Baghdad over the wall-mounted television set.

The correspondent was down on one knee, interviewing a young soldier who was lying on a stretcher holding his heavily bandaged leg. The soldier moaned into the microphone and pointed to a nearby house, “My buddy and I kicked in the door and charged in. Flashes from an automatic weapon lit the room and I felt a burning in my leg. I returned fire nailing the terrorist. He spun around against the wall and slid dead to the floor. My buddy dragged me out here and called a medic.” The soldier raised his hand and shouted, “God Bless America!”

“God Bless America Indeed!” the correspondent agreed. We salute you. You truly exemplify the self-sacrificing spirit that our country was founded upon.” The correspondent arose and the camera panned into the door of the darkened house where a lone candle on a table revealed a woman weeping over the lifeless body of her husband.

~

Randy sprung from his seat, strode around the room ranting, “Can you believe that? I go to prison for killing in self-defense but a soldier in the Army gets praise and glory for doing the same thing. Why? Because he had a license to kill, and I didn't?” The other prisoners, numbed by his frequent outbursts, gave him blank stares. He walked up to the TV, raised a fist and beckoned to the correspondent, “Come on dude interview me. I'll tell you my story.”

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My story Randy thought, still hardened over his bitter past.

~

His mind reeled back ten years to a night when he was nineteen, hanging out in a park with his high school gang, the Cobras. They were laughing and drinking beer in Ken Wilson's white Pontiac Bonneville, when their rival gang the Jackals pulled up behind them in a black Lincoln Town Car.

The four Jackals jumped out of the Town Car and strolled around the Bonneville several times. The Cobras grinned at each other looking forward to a good fight. Frank Hudson, the burly leader of the Jackals approached, dragging a heavy chain and shouting, "This is our turf!" He swung the chain round and round over his head and then down into the front passenger window, sending a shower of glass into Tom Brown's face.

Randy sprang from the back seat. The door knocked Frank down onto the sidewalk.

Ken Wilson and Billy Joe Johnson pulled their knives and jumped out the other side of the car onto the street, charging the rest of the taunting Jackals gang while Tom sat in the front seat picking glass out of his eyes.

Frank jumped up and spun around with his chain, catching Randy around the left leg. One swift jerk and Randy was lying on the sidewalk. Frank pulled the chain loose and swung it high over his head, this time to strike Randy in the face.

Randy, trembling, cursed, rolled over, pulled a snub nosed revolver from his belt and fired twice.

Time froze. Frank lay dead in a pool of blood. The Jackals and Cobras fled the scene.

~

Remembering left Randy depressed. He wandered back to the table, sat on his stool, resumed eating, and muttered, "Licensed to kill. That's it. Licensed to kill."

2

“Come with me philosopher,” a prison guard chided as he tapped Randy on the shoulder, waking him from his flashback. Randy knew the routine well. He had been called to the warden's office many times because of his attitude. Now that he had made a scene he dreaded the thought of having to endure another lecture on the subject.

Randy passed his hands through his thick blonde hair, drying the nervous sweat from his palms as he followed the guard into the warden's office. The air was tense as the two men stood staring at each other in silence. The warden handed a large manila envelope to Randy. “Here are your personal effects. You have been pardoned and you are free to go.”

Randy closed his eyes and shook his head, not believing what he had heard. Pardoned? No way. He had received a life sentence for killing Frank and expected this prison to be his home forever. Memories flooded his mind as he looked into the envelope and saw his old wallet, his keys, and a well-worn address book. He flipped through the book and saw a blur of names of people, most of who had forgotten him.

“I really don't know how you received a pardon,” the warden brooded. “I hope you have learned a lesson, but I'm not sure.”

Without looking up, Randy shot back “Yes, we'll see won't we.” His gray eyes clouded with resentment as he took his things out of the envelope and set it on the warden's desk.

The warden shoved a bundle of street clothes into Randy's arms and pointed to the restroom. “Change in there.”

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Randy took off his prison garb, put on his new clothes, stuffed his belongings into his pockets and walked back into the office.

The warden gave Randy two hundred dollars and a bus ticket home. Randy put the new bills and ticket in his wallet and stood in silence.

“Good luck,” the warden offered as he held out his hand. Randy put his wallet back into his pocket, ignored the warden’s hand, turned to the guard and said, “Let’s go.” The guard scolded, “Man, you need to learn to show some respect!” The warden silenced the guard with an upraised hand. “Just get him out of here.”

Randy followed the guard through a series of locked gates and walked out into the afternoon sun. Across the parking lot a prison bus waited to take him to a main bus line in Pine Bluff.

The warden watched out the window until Randy got on the bus. “Yes, we will see.” He threw the envelope into a trashcan and slammed the cabinet drawer.

Randy sat behind the driver, looked back at the prison gate through the barred bus windows and stewed, *I won't be free until I get off of this bus.*

~

After five minutes, that seemed an eternity, he barked at the driver, “Why aren't we leaving?”

The driver turned around and grinned, “We're waiting on another guy who's being released today.” Then gesturing to the prison, he said “I would have thought you would have learned some patience in thereby now.”

Randy cursed the driver and squirmed in his seat until a tall black man climbed on the bus and sat across from him. The driver closed the door, pulled out of the parking lot, and headed down the road to Pine Bluff.

Randy reached across the aisle and shook the man's hand. “Randy Whitaker's my name.”

“Joe Jameson. I've seen you around.”

“You got set free today too?”

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“I've been free for a long time,” Joe said with a big smile, “but they let me out today.”

Randy grimaced, trying to ignore Joe's comment. Then he asked, “What were you in for?”

“Rape.” Pointing back out the window Joe sighed, “I've been in that prison for twenty-five years. Some new lawyers proved that I was innocent using DNA samples, so the warden released me.”

“But ... twenty-five years of your life! You must be plenty mad. I'd get even for that,” Randy fumed kicking the seat in front of him.

“No, not really” Joe laughed. “I haven't lost anything because I didn't have life when I came to this place.” He shook his head. “I can't hold any grudges against people who did me wrong. God loved me when I was his enemy and mistreated him and others. Jesus said *'This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you.'* That means in the same way.”

“Look man, don't preach the Bible to me” Randy growled through clenched teeth, “I've heard it all. You can knock off your religious garbage. There's no one here to impress. You can be real now.”

Joe just smiled and sang: *“Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.”*

Randy scowled, turned away and watched the trees blur by as the bus rolled on to the next scene in his life.

~

“Ya'll come back...you hear.” The bus driver chuckled as he opened the door and watched Randy and Joe step down to the sidewalk at the Pine Bluff bus station. Randy shook his fist. Joe just smiled and thanked the driver for the ride.

Randy and Joe sat in silence on a dusty bench until an old Greyhound bus roared to a stop in front of them.

~

Randy didn't move until Joe boarded the bus and got settled; then Randy got

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on and found a seat near the back next to an elderly lady.

“Are you a student?” the lady asked politely as the bus headed north on Interstate 530.

“Yes ma'am, I just got out of prison. I learned a lot there.”

“What on earth were you in prison for? You look like such a fine young man.”

Randy leaned over, held her eyes and said, “For murder.”

“O dear God! The lady gasped as she jumped away and moved closer to the window and fixed her gaze outside.

Randy laughed, leaned back in his seat, and took a nap.

When the bus pulled into the Washington Ave station in North Little Rock, Randy turned back and bowed to the lady, “Goodbye ma'am.”

She nodded and waited until he walked down the aisle to the door before she joined the exiting crowd.

Randy walked through the smell of sooty diesel exhaust and into the musty terminal. He got some change, and bought a bag of chips and a sandwich from a vending machine.

“Small world” Joe said as he walked by Randy. “Maybe we will see each other again sometime.”

“Hope not” Randy grunted as he went outside, caught a city bus and headed west.

~

Randy had just finished his sandwich when the bus driver made a routine stop at the State Capitol and waited for riders to come on board.

The capitol building was draped for the Fourth of July and a group of local pastors stood on the top of the front steps holding an American Flag, a Star of David flag, a Christian Church Flag and a banner that proclaimed them as the *Christians for the Preservation of Israel*. Their supporters filled the

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steps and flowed down into the walkway areas, smiling as they handed out pamphlets that solicited support for their cause.

A large crowd gathered on the lawn having a picnic celebration listened to the speech. Anti-war protestors marched back and forth on the sidewalk jostling peace signs and chanted “No More War! They were tearing up all the pamphlets they could get their hands on. Curious, Randy stepped off the bus and made his way through the crowd until he reached the foot of the steps.

He looked up and saw a portly man in his mid fifties who he recognized as Joel Prindell, the pastor of his parent's church. Joel held a microphone as he read a petition that carried 200,000 signatures from around the state.

“We, the citizens of the State of Arkansas, petition our state representatives to support the defense of Israel. We ask that the *War on Terror* be extended to Iran and that pre-emptive strikes be made against Iranian nuclear plants so they will not be able to make nuclear weapons that they can use against Israel.”

The protestors jostled peace signs and chanted “NO MORE WAR! DON'T BOMB IRAN!”

A thin young man wearing old camouflage coveralls, hair down past his shoulders with a beard to match the length of his hair, brushed past Randy, ran up the steps, and asked Joel for the microphone. Joel, puzzled, handed it to him.

Everyone grew silent as the man took a few steps back. He pointed at Joel and then to the other preachers; “You call yourselves Christians, but you are hypocrites, no different than the enemies you want to destroy. You disgrace the Gospel of Jesus Christ. You don't know what the New Testament means! Jesus said we are to love our enemies but there is no place for his words in your fearful angry hearts. What makes you think that God will forgive you if you won't forgive those who have offended you? You...”

Joel glared, grabbed the microphone, and tried to resume his speech but the protestors booed and moved towards the steps: “Let the guy speak! We want to hear what he has to say!” But the police barred their way and made them disperse.

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Randy backed up and covered his ears with his hands. *Preachers! You can't get away from them.*

The thin man retreated down the steps, stopped in front of Randy, stared at him and disappeared into the crowd.

Randy walked back to the bus stop; his mind swirled with the man's words as he waited for another bus to take him home.

3

His neighborhood had changed little in the time he was gone. The trees were taller and the houses looked smaller. He drank in the air as he got off the bus at S. Woodrow Street and walked the three blocks to his parent's house. He paused for a moment then pushed the button to the doorbell.

~

His mother Peggy heard the ring. *Who could that be at this time of the afternoon* she wondered as she tossed the dishtowel onto the counter. She smoothed a wisp of her light red hair and walked to the door. The petite woman almost fainted when she opened the door and stood with her mouth gaping open, staring at her son.

“Hi mom. Catching flies?” Randy mimicked her as he dropped his jaw and put his hands to his head.

“Randy! What on earth are you doing here? Did you escape? Are they looking for you?” Peggy's eyes sparkled as she grabbed him, kissed him, looked up and down the street, and then dragged him through the door.

Randy regained his balance and laughed, “No mom, it's O.K. They let me go.”

“Greg! Greg!” Peggy shouted, “Randy is home. Our boy is home!”

Randy's father Greg, a wiry man in his mid 60s with dull brown eyes and a sallow face, crawled out from under his truck, wiped the grease from his hands, ran a comb through his dingy white hair, walked in from the garage and stood by Peggy staring in disbelief at their wayward son.

“The warden called me into his office this morning and said I was pardoned.

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He was surprised too.”

Peggy pointed up the stairs, “your room is just like you left it.”

“Your motorcycle is in the shed in the back yard, I've kept it up,” Greg added proudly.

“There are some leftovers from lunch,” Peggy offered, “but I can send out for something else if you like.”

“No mom, don't make a fuss over me. Believe me I'm not picky.”

Mom's baked chicken, mashed potatoes and gravy, and peas were a treat after nothing but prison food for so long.

After Randy finished his meal, he helped Peggy clear the table and they retired to the living room. “It must have been two months since we visited you,” Peggy chattered. “My Lord! I can't believe my eyes. Here you are sitting here. You're free.”

Peggy's words jolted Randy back to his conversation with Joe Jameson. He smiled at her but something was wrong. He didn't really feel free.

After a while he grew restless and walked out to the shed in the back yard. He stood staring at his Harley, amazed at how his dad had kept it so clean. He took the keys from his pocket and straddled the bike. It started right up. He leaned back on the handlebars for a minute, relishing the throbbing feeling of having wheels under him again, but he wasn't ready to go out yet.

He turned the key off and sat quietly for several minutes.

~

Then he went up to his room and rummaged through his old clothes. He threw the ones that didn't fit any more into a bag and brought them downstairs. “Here's some stuff for the Salvation Army,” he smiled as he put the bag in the corner of the kitchen and gave his mom a hug.

They talked for a long time then he walked into the den and crashed on the sofa until he was awakened by the noise of the television set.

“Sorry to disturb you,” Peggy announced, but “I want to watch this Fourth

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of July celebration from the Kennedy amphitheater in Washington.”

~

Jack Harvey, a medium height heavysset man with thick glasses and thinning black hair, organizer of *Christians for the Preservation of Israel*, stood before an enormous Star of David that covered the curtain behind the stage.

“Our Jewish brothers,” Jack began, “Tonight we are gathered in the name of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to support your cause against Iran. We are honored to have the President of the United States, J.W. Lowery, who has graciously consented to be with us tonight. Welcome Mr. President.” Jack beamed as he gestured to the President to come forward.

President Lowery, a handsome Native American Cherokee from Oklahoma, rose from his chair, walked up, and shook Jack's hand while smiling into the camera. “Thank you Dr. Harvey. We are grateful indeed to have such loyal supporters of our *War on Terror*. God is granting us victories over the *Axis of Evil*. I salute our troops who are hunting down and destroying our enemies to preserve peace and liberty. We will crush any nation that stands in our way. You can count on me to do whatever it takes to get the job done.” J.W. held up his hands and proclaimed, “IN GOD WE TRUST!”

Fireworks filled the sky above the amphitheater. The jubilant crowd of four thousand waved American and Israeli flags and echoed “IN GOD WE TRUST!” They applauded loudly as Harvey shook the President's hand again and went on to introduce the many TV preachers and evangelists who were there on the special program.

“Today, we held rallies in all of the state capitols” Jack boasted as he began to show video clips. “Here's a shot from the rally at the Little Rock Capitol.” The camera panned across the crowd then showed the people on the steps. “There were anti-war demonstrations at some of the gatherings” Jack said in disgust, “but this is to be expected from those who do not understand our cause for peace in Israel.”

Turning to Greg, Peggy whispered “Isn't Dr. Harvey wonderful? He has such great love for God's chosen people.”

The camera briefly showed the young man that Randy had seen at the rally, then the cameras quickly turned away. Randy pointed at the TV, “That guy took the microphone away from Joel Prindell at the rally, but they didn't

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show that on the program tonight.”

“What did he say?” Peggy asked, rising up in her chair turning to Randy.

“He told Joel and the other preachers that they didn't understand the New Testament, and that they didn't love their enemies.”

“Well, I can see why they wouldn't want to show that on television. The young man is obviously a troublemaker.” Peggy frowned as she sat back in her seat.

“Probably a Communist!” Greg nodded in agreement as he frowned at the thought.

~

The next item on the news was the interview of the wounded soldier in Baghdad.

Randy said “I saw that clip this morning. It reminded me of when I killed Frank Hudson. It made me wonder if there is really any difference between gang wars and national wars.” Randy walked back into the kitchen for a glass of water.

Greg gasped and called after him. “You must be kidding! Of course there is a difference. You killed for petty reasons. Our soldiers are fighting for liberty.”

“Randy, how dare you say that our soldiers are wrong in fighting in wars?” Peggy objected. “What about all of our soldiers that were wounded and disabled fighting for us in wars? Some of them lost their legs, arms and some their eyes. Would you want to make them feel bad for what they did? They were trying to set oppressed people free. I'm sure they believed that what they were doing was right.”

“They probably thought so,” Randy agreed. “I'm just wondering about war and about what the man at the rally said.”

Greg lit his pipe. “You should forget those foolish questions and think about important things, like getting a job.”

“I'll look for one tomorrow, but now I need a good night's rest. See you guys

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in the morning.”

Randy kissed his mom and went up the stairs to his room.

~

He lay on his bed and stared at the ceiling, thinking back on the day, about the soldier that he had seen on TV, about Joe, about the mysterious man at the rally, about liberty and about how things at home hadn't changed a bit since he went to prison.

4

Early the next morning, Peggy was singing and cooking in the kitchen. Randy sneaked up behind her and grabbed her around the waist. She let out a squeal and swatted him on the behind. They both laughed and smiled at each other, happy over the unexpected homecoming.

“That coffee smells good” Randy said as he poured himself a cup, picked up the phone, and called his friend Tom Brown.

“Tom, I'm home,” Randy said excitedly.

“Cool! How did you get out?”

“Beats me, the warden was surprised too.”

“What are you going to do?”

“Get a job, in prison, I had a lot of training as an electrician. I'm pretty good at it and would like to get some experience.”

Tom was excited. “Say, I'm doing carpentry work for Keith Hudson. He is the superintendent of a new development, west of Holly Springs.”

Randy coughed, spewing his coffee all over the counter. He put the cup down and wiped up the mess with a rag. “Frank's father? You've got to be kidding. Remember? Frank, the guy I killed? Maybe he hired you but he'd never hire me!”

Tom laughed. “This guy is really different. I know he needs an electrician. It's worth a try. If you come over right now, you can follow me to the

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jobsite. Here's how you get to my place..."

Randy wrote down the directions, hung up the phone, and told his mom, "Tom said he may have a job for me."

Peggy sighed and shook her head. "You don't need to go back to your old friends. Don't get in trouble again."

"Don't worry mom I'll be good."

Then he went to the shed, pulled out on his bike, and rode to Tom's apartment. Tom was waiting for him in the parking lot. Slapped Randy on the back, "Man it's good to see you. Follow me!"

~

When Keith Hudson heard Randy's motorcycle, he got up from his desk and walked to the window. He brushed the dust from his jeans and he went outside and greeted Randy.

"It's been a long time," Keith smiled extending his hand and fixing his dark kind eyes on the nervous young man.

Surprised at Mr. Hudson's friendliness, Randy looked down, timidly shook his hand and mumbled "Hello Mr. Hudson."

Keith cast questioning eyes at Tom.

Tom spoke up, "Mr. Hudson Randy is looking for a job. I told him you were looking for an electrician."

"What experience do you have Randy?"

"I went to electrical school in... prison."

"I hear they do a great teaching job. I bet you learned a lot. Follow me and I'll show you what the job would be."

Tom grinned, "I'll get to work, see you later."

Keith pointed to the building behind the construction office. "This is the warehouse, you'll find all the supplies you need. Does this interest you?"

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“Yes sir! Thanks.” Randy replied, still in a dumfounded fog.

“Do you have any tools?”

“No sir but I'll get some.”

“Meanwhile you can use mine” Keith offered.

They walked down the street looking at a dozen or so houses under various degrees of completion. Randy's heart beat fast and his mind spun. *I can't believe how nice this guy is treating me after what I did to his son.*

“Let's go into my office and I'll sign you up. I'll give you a set of job tasks each morning. Here is something you can start on today.”

Randy, astonished, stood staring at the work order. He went into the warehouse, picked up a belt of tools and a box of electrical outlets and set out for house number 3419.

~

After work, Tom caught up with Randy in the parking lot. “I'm meeting Ken and Billy Joe at the Golden Goose Bar and Grill at 7:00. Do you want to come?”

“Sure, where is it? I haven't been around for a while.”

“It's only been open for a couple of months, it's on the Northeast corner of I-630 and Pine Street, on the service road.”

Randy cranked his bike. “See you there.” Then he went home to change clothes.

~

In another part of town, Alice Hudson, Keith's wife, heard the garage door open. She pulled back her long black hair into a ponytail and moved a laundry basket away from the door so Keith could come in.

Keith walked into the kitchen, kissed Alice and sat down at the table.

“You're home early” she smiled.

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“It's been a strange day. You won't believe who came to see me today... Randy Whitaker.”

Randy! An icy shudder went up Alice's spine.

“He got out of prison and is staying with his parents,” Keith continued with a serious look. “I told him he could come and work for me.”

“What???” she cried with pleading eyes. “Have you forgotten what he did? I didn't object when you hired Tom. He was part of Randy's gang. He wasn't the one who killed Frank... But hiring Randy?”

Keith put his arms around her. “I know it hurts dear. It hurts me too, I miss Frank so much, but we need to put that all behind us.”

5

The Golden Goose was a cozy pub, crowded and noisy. Tom led Randy to a table in the corner where Ken and Billy Joe were drinking beer, and a girl Randy didn't know was with them, sipping a cup of coffee.

The two guys gave Randy the old Cobra snake tongue sign with their fingers. Randy grinned and signed them back.

Tom put his hand on the girl's shoulder. "June, this is Randy Whitaker, an old friend. Randy, this is June Davis."

Randy nodded with a bright smile.

Turning to the guys, Randy asked, "What have you guys been doing?"

Billy Joe frowned, "Robbing old ladies, dealing drugs, fighting with the Jackals, like always." Then they all laughed.

Randy smiled, sat down, and ordered a beer.

Billy Joe continued, "Well, the truth is, what happened at the park scared the Hell out of us. We all went straight. I went to college, got a degree in accounting. I work for a tax office downtown."

"I joined the Army" Ken said. "Went to Iraq."

"Tom told me about that" Randy said, then thinking about the soldier he had seen on the news, he asked "See any action?"

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“A little,” Ken answered reservedly.

“Just like old times wasn't it?” Randy smirked.

“What old times?”

“Like the wars we used to get into with the Jackals.”

“You're serious?” Ken asked indignantly.

Randy turned away from Ken. “Billy Joe, how about the Jackals?”

“They went straight too. We never see them...except for Mike Allen. He manages *The Brown Bean Coffee Shop* over on Interstate 430. He's married and has a kid.”

“Mike!” Randy shouted, slamming his fist on the wooden table, making June's coffee spill and the beer glasses jump. “He's the one who squealed on me. If he had kept his mouth shut, no one would have ever known what I did. There weren't any other people near us at the park that night.”

“Things happen Randy,” Tom said.

“Right, things happen.” Randy snarled, “You guys can quit and forget it all. Ken can play his war game, settling the score with the Terrorists. But I won't forget. I'm going to settle my score with Mike.”

“Take it easy man.” Ken cautioned.

Randy jumped up, grabbed Ken by the collar, dragged him out of his chair, and yelled in his face. “You take it easy glory boy! You just went straight and got paid for your killing. Don't you remember why we formed our gang? The Jackals molested and beat up your sister, threw her in a ditch and burned her car! The law wouldn't touch it. Not substantial proof they claimed. So we took the matter into our own hands.”

Ken jerked loose from Randy's grip, pushed him away and straightened his shirt. “Man, what's wrong with you?”

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Randy glowered at the nosy people around him. Then he sat down and was quiet for a while.

“Excuse me June,” Randy finally apologized. He got her a fresh cup of coffee and cleaned the table with some napkins. “I spent ten years in prison for defending myself. It's hard to forget. Then he lightened up and grinned. Why do you hang around with these thugs? Where do you work?”

“They are all right guys” June laughed. “I work at a bookstore by Fair Park on Markham and N. Tyler Street.”

“Well I joined the work force today thanks to Tom and Mr. Hudson.”

“Can you believe that?” Billy Joe asked amazed. “Mr. Hudson hiring Tom and now you, after what you did to Frank.”

“Mr. Hudson is a real special guy” June smiled. “A real special guy.”

They all caught up on what they had been doing for the last ten years. At 11:00 Tom looked at Randy. “We'd better go get some rest. Another day's work tomorrow.”

Randy held out his hand to Ken. “Sorry Ken, I shouldn't have taken my stuff out on you.”

“It's cool Randy” Ken smiled, shaking Randy's hand. “I'm glad you are out.”

“Bye Billy Joe, and you too June.” Randy said courteously. “Thanks for putting up with me. Hope I didn't ruin your evening.”

“Join us anytime” June smiled.

As they walked out, Randy put his arm around Tom's shoulder, “Thanks for everything Tom. You're a good friend. I especially appreciate you keeping in touch with me over the years. It meant a lot.”

“Sure,” Tom said. “That's what friends are for, isn't it?”

“I wouldn't know”, Randy confessed. “I've never been a friend to anyone.”

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Randy rode home depressed over his behavior. *I wish I was like Mr. Hudson, but I'll never change.*

~

The next morning at 7:30 sharp Randy walked into Mr. Hudson's office.

“Hi Randy,” greeted Keith. Today you can install the lights in house 3513. They are in a box in the warehouse.”

“OK. Thanks again for the job.”

Randy worked hard all day and when it was time to quit, he went back to the warehouse to return some unused items.

He noticed several nail guns on a shelf. *He'll never miss one of these,* Randy thought as he picked one up, looked outside the door, and put it in the saddlebag of his motorcycle. *I'll sell this at the pawnshop tonight, it will bring a good price,* he thought as he looked around again to see if anyone had seen him.

Keith watched, disappointed, through a curtain on the back window. Then when he saw Randy coming towards the office, he quickly walked back to his desk and sat down.

Randy walked in. “Hello Mr. Hudson. I'm finished.”

“How did it go today Randy?”

“Great. It feels good to work.”

“Good, see you tomorrow.”

~

Saturday morning, after he finished the living room lights in house 3513, Randy went to Keith's office. “Mr. Hudson do you have a minute to talk?” Randy asked with apprehension.

“Sure Randy, come I'll take you to lunch.”

They drove in silence to a sandwich shop.

“It's on me Randy,” Keith offered, “Get whatever you want.” They carried

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their food to a table and sat down. Then Keith prayed. “Jesus thank you for this food. Thank you for Randy. Bless us all, Amen.”

“Amen” Randy answered as he thought; *Mr. Hudson really meant that prayer.* Then he started in on his sandwich.

“What is it that you want to talk to me about?”

Moved by Keith's sincerity, Randy hung his head and confessed, “You're are so good. You aren't like me. I'm a murderer, and now a thief. I haven't changed at all. I stole a nail gun out of the storeroom and sold it.”

“I know” Keith said, scratching his head, “I saw you through the window.”

“But you didn't say anything!”

Keith looked at Randy seriously, “I'm no different than you. I've stolen things before, and I'm a murderer too.”

“What! Who did you kill?” Randy was bewildered.

“You... I hated you for four years and wished you were dead. Jesus says that's the same thing as killing. For a long time, I tried my best to change, to let it go, but I couldn't. Will you forgive me?”

Randy blushed. Finally he stammered, “Forgive you??? Sure, but you don't seem to hate me now. How did you change?”

“The change started at 9/11 when the World Trade Center was attacked and all those people were killed. That attack made me think about you and Frank and your gangs. I felt about you like I felt about the terrorists. The whole country wanted to wipe out the terrorists. I did too. We were all saying God Bless America and we waved our flags. One day, I saw President J.W. Lowery on television. He said that we would not rest until evil and terror are wiped out entirely. That night I picked up a Bible, something I rarely did. It opened to where Jesus said that we must love our enemies. I knew I surely didn't. Then it hit me. How can we think that we can wipe out terror by killing people? This is when I saw I needed a new kind of love. I couldn't go on the way I felt about the terrorists and about you. I saw that whatever our country was founded on, it wasn't Christianity. I asked God to

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give me the real thing. He is being faithful to my prayer.”

Randy stammered “I don't understand why you are so nice to me, especially since what I did to Frank. I'm sorry about what happened. It was so sudden. I really didn't know what I was doing. We were in gangs and things got out of hand.”

“I know Randy. That's in the past, but this is today.”

“I'll get the nail gun back for you.”

“Fine” Keith said, “But I'm not worried about it. Pass the ketchup. These are good fries aren't they?”

“Sure are” Randy agreed with a smile of relief as he finished his food.”

When they returned to the jobsite, Randy spent the afternoon installing the rest of the lights.

~

After work, as he started his bike, angry thoughts about Mike rose to his mind. *I've got to teach that guy a lesson.*

Instead of going home, he headed North on Interstate 430. He stopped at a pizza parlor and ate, then continued on to the *Brown Bean Coffee Shop*. It was getting dark as he waited for Mike to close. Mike pulled on the shop door to make sure it was locked. Satisfied, he walked across the parking lot to his car. He had just opened the car door when he noticed a figure walk out of the shadows.

“Randy!” he choked. “I heard you were out. Good to see you.”

“Is it?” Randy said softly, his eyes blazing with hate. “You slime. You turned me in. I've thought about this for a long time.”

“Things have changed” Mike whimpered, “The gangs are all broken up.”

“Yes, and that breaks me up” Randy said, as he pulled a knife and backed Mike into the open door of his car.

“I'm sorry Randy!” Mike pleaded.

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Randy grabbed him by the hair and slashed the knife across his chin.
“Here's something to remember. Keep your mouth shut this time. If...”

Before he could finish his sentence, Randy saw a police car round the corner down the street and head their direction. He shoved Mike into the car and climbed in behind him, closing the door. He kept the knife to Mike's throat.
“As I was saying, keep your mouth shut if you know what's good for you.”

After the police were gone Randy smirked, “Mike, it's been good seeing you!” He got out of the car, slammed the door and walked away.

Mike drove to the emergency room and had the cut stitched up. When he got home he told his wife that he had tripped in the parking lot and hit his chin on a post. She said “Sorry Honey,” but somehow she new better.

Randy rode home and went upstairs.

~
“Are you hungry?” Peggy called from the kitchen.

“No Mom,” Thanks anyway.

I am hungry Randy agonized, but I don't know what for.

6

Randy lay in bed for a long time tormented by his anger. He couldn't sleep so he turned on the radio to drown his thoughts. An old *Eagle's* song - *Lying eyes* was playing:

“ ... *Ain't it funny how your new life didn't change things?
You're still the same old girl you used to be.
Honey you can't hide those lying eyes.*”

He turned the radio off and cursed when he thought about what he had just done to Mike. *My pardon from prison was a farce. It really didn't change a thing. How can Keith forgive me, love me and give me a job but I can't forgive Mike?*

~

The next morning was Sunday. Peggy called up to Randy “Do you want to go to church with us?”

I need something. It's worth a try he thought, “Sure, I'll be down in a minute.”

~

The songs were lively. People raised their hands, shouted and danced. TV cameramen captured the crowd and the pastor for live television. Randy liked the atmosphere.

After the offering was received, Pastor Prindell came forward and gave his message.

“God has given us all the weapons we need to battle against the devil” Joel exhorted. “Let us remember that we do not battle against flesh and blood. Our grievances are not against people. Exercise your faith and do exploits

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in the heavenlies where you are seated with Christ.”

Maybe this is what Mr. Hudson was talking about, Randy thought.

Pastor Prindell continued, “Thanks to all of you who showed up at the rally at the capitol Wednesday. We need to show support for our government so that they will do everything they can to destroy those who want to destroy Israel. As Jack Harvey said, ‘it is the responsibility of our Christian nation to keep Israel from being destroyed before the end times are here.’ “

The congregation applauded and cheered. Something Randy couldn't put his finger on bothered him.

Joel went on, “We should thank God that we are not evil men like Saddam Hussein, Yasser Arafat and Osama Bin Laden. We fear God and are good moral people.”

“Praise the Lord,” someone shouted.

Randy shook his head to clear his mind like he was coming out of a stupor. Something was wrong. *What does he mean? I know I am evil, I thought we weren't suppose to brag about being spiritual.*

In the lobby, after the service Joel Prindell called out, “Hello Peggy, Hi Greg.” He walked over and put his hand on their shoulders, then turning to Randy he said, “glad you're home, come by and visit me sometime.”

“I might just do that,” Randy answered cautiously. “I do have some questions about your sermon.”

The Whitakers said their goodbyes and went to the cafeteria for lunch.

~

They went through the long line, found a table, unloaded their trays, and sat down. Peggy said a quick blessing and they began to eat.

“Wasn't that a good sermon?” Peggy asked, munching on a piece of cornbread.

“It was confusing to me,” Randy complained. “One minute the pastor was saying that we do not do battle against people, and the next minute he was

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praising the effort of our troops to do battle against people.”

“Well, Joel Prindell is a good pastor. We can trust what he says.”

“He's been to several Bible Colleges. I've seen the diplomas on the wall in his office,” Greg added.

“I don't know what he learned there but his actions and words don't match,” Randy complained. “I see why the man at the rally confronted him.”

“O my Lord!” Peggy whispered, putting her hand on Randy's arm, “Look who is sitting at the table against the far wall behind you. The Hudsons! I hope they don't see us. I wouldn't know what to say.”

Keith spotted Randy and waved. Then he left a tip on the table, took Alice by the hand and walked with her to the table where Peggy, Greg and Randy were sitting.

Greg and Randy stood up. “Hello Mr. Hudson.” Randy said. Then he turned to Alice and said in an embarrassed voice. “Hello Mrs. Hudson.”

“Hello,” Alice mumbled, avoiding Randy's eyes.

“Would you like to join us?” Peggy asked, hoping they would decline.

“No thank you” Alice said quietly, “we were finished.”

“Good seeing all of you,” Keith said as he took Alice's arm and walked with her to the cashier.

~

When they got home, Randy didn't go into the house. He sat on the front porch frustrated about the contradictions he heard at church, and frustrated about the contradictions within himself.

He heard a motorcycle next door. He walked around the corner of the house and saw his neighbor astride a Royal Blue hard-tail chopper. Randy recognized him as the protester at the rally.

Randy walked over to admire the bike.

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“Hi Randy “ The rider said. “I'm Charlie Hathaway, do you remember me.”

“Now I do, I saw you at the rally but I didn't recognize you.” Randy laughed as he shook Charlie's hand. “What's with the camouflage clothes? You were always so preppy.”

“I wore these in Iraq. They are pretty worn out, like me I guess.”

“Iraq? When were you there? Were you in combat?”

“I went over a year after you went to prison, I was in combat zones as a chaplain. But that was another life ago.”

“How about your mom and dad, do they still live here?”

“No, they both died in a car accident a year after I got back.” Then changing the subject, Charlie said, “ I'm just getting away for awhile. Want to come along?”

Randy hesitated, not wanting to get preached at, but said, “Sure, I'll get my bike.”

~

Silently, solemnly they moved together Northwest on Hwy 10 through the woodlands to Lake Maumelle. Randy had not felt so good for a long time.

They pulled into a café, stretched and looked across the beauty of the lake before they went inside and ordered some coffee.

“Are you still in the service?” Randy broke the silence.

“No, I had enough of the confusion and heartbreak.”

“You were a chaplain, do you run a church somewhere now?”

“No, I'm still trying to sort some stuff out.”

“Me too. I saw a soldier on the news and it raised questions for me. Why is a soldier's killing OK but mine wasn't?”

“I know,” Charlie frowned. “I thought about you when I was over there,

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and about that same question. Most all of the soldiers that I have known had that question after they killed in combat. That is why it is so hard for them coming back to civilian life. They are used to fighting for survival and to protect their buddies. They are trained to be fighting units. The same feeling I supposed you had in your gang wars. I saw all sorts of guys in the Army. I think a lot of them really believed in what they were doing, but they really didn't want to kill anyone. When most of them did, they were traumatized. But as for me, I just tried to comfort them and keep them from falling apart. I don't think I did a good job of it. It was rough over there. Soldiers have a lot to deal with, not just physically, but mentally and emotionally...and spiritually, he added.”

“Do they believe in God?”

“Just like everyone, they're hoping that God is watching over them. I remember one soldier in particular,” Charlie said as he took a picture out of his wallet and handed it to Randy. “This was Larry McGill. He had joined the Army because his father thought he was a coward. Larry was hard. He had become a different person. He was motivated by anger, aggression and hate. They had overtaken him. He was now a killer. He wanted to kill. He yearned to kill his enemies. He considered himself a Christian but thought God didn't want to hear from him any more. He knew that he had hardened his conscience and was arrogant and merciless. He thought he was beyond redemption. His only goal was to keep his men alive.”

Charlie put the picture back. “McGill was tormented with the same question. One day after chapel, he came to me and said “Chaplain, I can't take this any more. Every time I look down the sights of my gun and see another human being, a coldness flows through me, my conscience tells me to stop, but I drive the thought away and numbly pull the trigger. It happens so fast. Is my boot camp conditioning what keeps me doing that or is it something else?”

Charlie groaned, “I didn't know what to tell him. He was killed the next day.”

Then Charlie caught his breath and continued. “Being over there made me question what it means to be a Christian. I guess you have to put the words of Jesus about loving your enemies on the shelf until you get your job done. We do that with a lot of things in our everyday lives, not just with combat. I

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don't know what God thinks any more. Can't say that he cares any more about us than he cares about the enemy. Who knows? I thought that when I got back here, I'd get answers, but found that the churches don't want to deal with the question at all. They don't want their comfy standard of living shaken by turning the other cheek.”

“You were challenging Joel Prindell at the rally,” Randy said. “Isn't he your pastor?”

“He was before I left for Iraq.” Charlie answered sadly. “He encouraged me to become a Chaplain, but when I got back he wouldn't listen to the questions I had. His agenda doesn't have place for the things Jesus said.”

“I was confused by what he preached this morning,” Randy said. He talked about spiritual warfare but believed in physical warfare too.”

“I know, that was a real challenge when I was in Iraq” Charlie confided. I couldn't resolve the conflict between the two. It was so real there. Not just a Sunday school theoretical discussion. I decided to go with what Jesus said and rid myself of my worldly weaponry. I decided to go with the armor of God alone, you know the helmet of Salvation, breastplate of righteousness the shield of faith and our feet shod with the gospel of peace. I figured that God must have been telling the Apostle Paul that things had changed, and they were going to be different in the Kingdom of God. My only weapon from that time on was going to be the sword of the spirit- the Word of God. That's why I left the armed services. Joel didn't understand, he was intimidated when I challenged him with my dilemma when I got back.”

“What are you doing now?”

“I work at Jake's Cycle Shop, that's where I built my bike.”

“Nice,” Randy smiled.

It was dark when they got back home.

~

The next day, during his lunch break, Randy went in the warehouse to get a drink of water. Then he called June on the phone.

“Remember when we all got together last Thursday night? You said Mr.

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Hudson was a special person. Now I see what you mean. Would you like to meet me at the Golden Goose after work?"

"Sure, about 7:00?"

"See you then" Randy said expectantly.

7

Later in the afternoon, at the bookstore where June worked, Assad Ahmad, a computer tech finished replacing the network card in June's computer.

“There, that should do it.”

“Thanks Assad, you always are a great help” June smiled.

“No Problem” he said sadly.

“What's wrong?”

“I just got news that my youngest brother back home in Palestine is dead.”

“I'm sorry, what happened?”

He handed her a letter, “this is from my parents.”

She reached for the letter and read:

“Our Beloved Assad,

We have news for you. News that is sad, but also happy. This afternoon your brother Abdullah gave his life for Allah and our cause for freedom. Hamas told us about it, and gave us a copy of an article from an Israeli newspaper. It was written by an eye witness, a young Israeli girl who survived.”

June opened the news clipping which read:

“As I sat in a bus I saw a young man who was later identified as

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Abdullah Ahmad from the West Bank. He showed his pass and walked through an Israeli checkpoint, making his way through the crowd and got on our bus.

Everyone was hot and sweating. As the driver closed the door and the bus began to move, Abdullah stood up and yelled at the top of his voice 'Allah be praised.' Terror gripped us. I screamed and ran to the back of the bus and opened the emergency door. Three men attempted to tackle him, but it was too late. He jerked a strap from inside his robe and it was all over.

I was blown through the back door and fell on my back on the ground. As I lay there in pain I saw workers sifting through the burning bus and carrying off the charred bodies and screaming, bleeding, dismembered survivors.

I heard one emergency worker curse as he said, 'Here's what's left of the devil that did it'."

June returned the clipping to the envelope and continued reading the letter.

“Our son was not a devil. He was such a good boy! But now he is gone. We knew it would happen; he had gone through years of training for his mission. We had talked about it and how glorious it would be but that doesn't comfort me. When I received the news, I fell on the floor and cried. I feel better now so I can write you this letter. Your father Hazem said that Abdullah served his country and Allah faithfully. Hazem told me Abdullah was a martyr and the Quran says that martyrs go to paradise. He said, 'we are all proud of what Abdullah did. 'Greater love has no man than he lay down his life for his friends.' Hazem had read that somewhere.”

Wish you were here with us at this time.

Your mother,
Amira”

June cried and gave the letter back to Assad. “I don't want to make you feel worse but how can a suicide bomber killing other people be considered a martyr? Martyrdom is when other people kill you for your faith, not when

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you die trying to kill others.”

“But don't your soldiers do the same?” Assad asked. “They are brought up from birth pledging allegiance to your flag and train in military camps to kill, then they come over to our lands and kill our people in the name of your God. It's no different.”

“I know.” June wiped her eyes.

She saw a customer so she glanced back at Assad, “ I have to go. I'm meeting someone at the Golden Goose tonight at 7:00. He just got out of prison and doesn't know many people around here. I think you'd like to talk to him. Would you like to come?”

“Thanks, that might prove interesting.”

“We'll look for you.”

~

June waited at the door until Randy arrived. As they sat at a table she told him, “I invited Assad Ahmad to join us. He works on the computers at the bookstore. He was sad today because his younger brother died in Israel.”

“There he is now,” June motioned, stood up and waved at Assad who had just walked in the door.

“Assad this is Randy Whitaker. Randy this is Assad Ahmad,” June introduced the two men as they shook hands then they sat down.

“Do you want some coffee?” Randy asked.

“That would be nice” Assad replied politely.

Randy waved to a waitress to take Assad's order.

“June tells me that your brother was killed. What happened?”

“It is difficult to talk about. I'm not sure you will understand. My brother Abdullah was, as you would say, a suicide bomber. He died two days ago while blowing up a bus in Israel. My mother is upset. I am too.”

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“I can understand killing” Randy replied, “Last week I was released from prison where I was serving time for killing a man in a street fight. We were a high school gang; we were defending our turf, our land in a way. We were fighting against the Diablos, another group who claimed the same land and wanted to come into our territory and take over.”

Assad leaned back as the waitress brought the coffee. “Thank you” he said with a sad smile. Then he turned to Randy. “It sounds like the same thing to me as what we are dealing with in the Mideast since the *League of Nations* took over our land. On a different scale, but the same thing.”

Randy was surprised to find a sympathizer.

Assad continued. “I have listened to your president speak about his *War on Terror*. And I saw an interview of a soldier on the news one night last week. The soldier was being praised for killing a terrorist as you call our people who fight against America and Israel. I thought America was a Christian nation. I know a little about your religion. Did not Jesus say in your Bible that you were supposed to love your enemies?”

“Yes, June said getting into the conversation, that is what Christians are supposed to do.”

“Well, if you don't want to do what Jesus said, how can you call yourselves Christians. and say that you are his followers? Do you think it does not matter that you do not do what the founder of your religion says?”

June lowered her eyes deliberating on what she was learning. Then she said. “Many who call themselves Christians do not understand what a Christian is. It's a matter of whose spirit you have, God's or the Devil's. When we were still the enemies of God, he forgave us and sent Jesus to die for us. If we have the Holy Spirit, we will forgive others when they are still our enemies. If we don't have that spirit, then we are not Christians.”

Assad laughed: “You need to tell those who call themselves Christians, but who want to war and kill, that they should become Militant Muslims. Then at least they could kill without being hypocrites.”

The conversation hit Randy hard. The hair on the back of his neck bristled as he thought about what he did to Frank, what Joe Jameson said, how Keith

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had forgiven him, how he still hated Mike, and his conversation with Charlie. Tears were running down his cheek. Joyful tears that he did not understand, but somehow, he knew he was finally on the road that he was meant to be on.

They talked about work for a while, paid their bill, and walked out to the front porch. Assad gave Randy a business card. "If you want to get together, give me a call." Then he walked to his car.

"Thanks June," Randy said as he turned to her. "I'm glad I met you."

June smiled. "Me too."

Randy paused in the parking lot and thought about Alice. A deep sadness moved in his heart, he knew it was time to go see her.

~

Randy rang the Hudson's doorbell and shuffled back and forth on his feet. Alice walked from the bedroom, not prepared for what she would see. She opened the door and trembled, not able to speak.

"Mrs. Hudson, may I come in?" Randy pleaded.

Alice looked down at the floor and stepped back out of the doorway.

Randy walked into the den and sat on the sofa. Alice closed the door and sat in a chair across from him and gazed at Randy with forlorn eyes.

Randy started to cry. "Mrs. Hudson I'm so sorry for what I did to Frank and to your family. I cannot imagine the hurt and grief that you have suffered. You probably wanted me to rot in prison and maybe I should have. But for some reason, I am here sitting here in your house. I don't know what else to say, but please forgive me."

Alice broke, held her face in her hands and began to cry uncontrollably. She looked up. "I don't know if I have forgiveness in me. I want to. My God I want to! This bitterness is eating me up. Please give me time Randy." She ran back into her bedroom, fell on the bed and sobbed.

Keith, who had been in the kitchen listening, came up to Randy and hugged him, "Thank you Randy, things will be all right now."

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Later that night Randy leaned back in a chair in his room thinking about what Alice had said.

Time, Randy stewed, *that has never changed anything*. He picked up his Bible and read several familiar verses. They were just words on a page. Like Alice, he too remained in despair, with no hope of ever changing.

8

The next night after work, Randy stood in the open door of Joel Prindell's office and said, "Got a minute?"

"Sure Randy, come on in, what's on your mind?"

Randy turned a chair around and straddled it, looked around the office then faced Joel. "Well, there's a lot of stuff rolling around in my mind, things that don't fit together."

"Like what?"

"Like a wounded soldier being interviewed in Iraq? It was on the news last Wednesday."

"Yes I saw that."

"Why did he get praise for killing, and I got prison?"

"You can't be serious" Joel stared bewildered. "The soldiers of America have authority from the people. You had no authority to kill, that's why you went to prison."

"Authority? You're the one who can't be serious," Randy said with a frown. "In a democracy, people invent their own authority. America made up it's own rules and stole the land from the Indians and the Mexicans. Our gang didn't do anything different than the patriots of the American Revolution. We gave ourselves authority, just like the American people did."

"Are you trying to justify what you did?"

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“No more than our government is doing. Why is killing justified in one case and not in the other?”

Joel didn't know what to say.

Randy continued. “Something else doesn't fit. I saw you at the rally last Wednesday; you were saying that we should bomb Iran.”

“Yes I did” Joel answered emphatically, “They are a threat to Israel and America.”

“Then on Sunday morning you preached that we don't war against people, that we do not war against flesh and blood.”

Joel was caught off guard. Before he could think, Randy continued.

“Doesn't that doubletalk blow your mind? How can you believe such opposite things?”

Joel shot back, “ Not warring against flesh and blood only applies to Christians acting as people, as private individuals, not to Christians fighting in the military.”

“You mean a Christian stops being a person when they are in the military?”

Joel swallowed hard.

Randy went on. “I'm not the only one with these questions. Last night I met a man from Jordan who asked me why Christians kill. His brother, a suicide bomber blew himself up in a bus. That man thought he was serving his God and laid down his life for his friends and country. What about that guy? Who's to say that terrorists are not justified to attack us because they want us out of their land?”

Joel defended, “There are young American Soldiers in Iraq putting their lives on the line to set the Iraqi's free, give them democracy and preserve our way of life.”

Randy replied soberly, “ I suppose I'm having second thoughts about this

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dream, and the killing it takes to keep that dream alive. Is this so-called standard of living that we are trying to save really worth killing for? There must be more to being a Christian. And Charlie Hathaway thinks so too.”

“Charlie is a looser, a dropout” Joel scorned; “he threw away a bright future in the ministry.”

Randy scowled “Well, if he threw away what you have, I think he is pretty bright. Pastor, I have to go. If you figure all this out, let me know.”

When Randy reached the door, he stopped and turned around. “There is one more thing you said Sunday.”

Joel didn't respond, not knowing what he was going to get hit with next.

“You said that we should thank God that we are not evil men like Saddam Hussein, Yasser Arafat and Osama Bin Laden.”

“Yes indeed” Prindell asserted with a smile. “We have been made righteous by the Blood of Jesus. We are not evil like those men are.”

“Well, I know that I am still pretty rotten. God's got a long way to go to clean me up. I can't really say that I am better than those men are.” Then Randy asked with a stern look, “Didn't Jesus say something in one of his parables, about a Pharisee and a Publican. And I thought the Apostle Paul said we were not to judge people. You may want to read that. See you around.”

Randy walked out leaving Joel stunned ... speechless.

~

When Randy got back home from talking to Joel, he went over and knocked on Charlie's door.

When Charlie opened the door, Randy shook his head. “Chaplain, I need some answers.”

“Come in Randy, I'll make some coffee.”

“I just got back from talking to Joel Prindell.”

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“How did that go?”

“Joel didn't have answers.”

“Did you expect him to?”

“Not really,” Randy answered, sipping his coffee at the kitchen table. Then changing the subject Randy confessed “Saturday night I knifed the guy who turned me in for killing Frank ten years ago. I hate myself, but can't change. I try to do what's right for a while then give up trying, it has always been this way.”

Charlie looked up at Randy “Trying won't cut it. You don't hate yourself, what you hate is that you really love the way you are.”

“I guess so, do I need to be re-programmed? A Bible chip implanted in my brain?” Randy laughed.

“Not a brain chip. You just can't change the way you think and do. What you think comes from a deeper place. You need a heart transplant, a spiritual one. That's what has to change, but you don't have the ability to change it. You're a walking dead man. You have to be born again.”

“Cheap words...Born Again,” Randy smirked. “I've heard that too many times in prison, it was just a way to con the system and get out.”

“Being born again isn't something you can do. God has to do it, but you have to really want it. It will cost you your resentment and bitterness. The things that you live for are eating you up. You haven't bottomed out yet. Right now it sounds like you are just cherishing your wounds.”

“Maybe... I suppose that I'm just not ready to pay that kind of price. Thanks for the coffee Charlie, and for listening.”

“You bet. Anytime.”

9

The next afternoon Randy and Keith were at *The Home Warehouse* maneuvering a stove and a dishwasher on flatbed carts through the checkout line. Randy spotted Joel Prindell in the next line. Their eyes met and though he didn't really want to talk to Randy any more, Joel felt pressured to say hello. He paid for his desk lamp then walked over to Randy.

“My old one burned out last night,” he told Randy as he held up his lamp.

“Hello Pastor Prindell, this is my boss Keith Hudson” Randy said proudly.

“Mr. Hudson this is Joel Prindell. He is the pastor at Prince of Peace Christian Church. My parents go there.”

“Prince of Peace. What a good name for a church” Keith observed. “And what a good message that gives.”

Joel blushed as conviction fell on him. *Peace, that isn't what I've been preaching.*

“Can I buy you a cup of coffee?” Keith offered shaking Joel's hand.

“There's a shop in this building - they're everywhere these days.”

“Sure” Joel agreed nervously, “let me put this lamp in my car and I'll meet you guys there.”

Keith and Randy loaded their purchases in the van and joined Joel in the coffee shop.

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“It's been a strange week,” Joel said, sipping his coffee. “A protester interrupted my speech at the rally at the Capitol, and Randy roasted me with questions last night.”

Keith looked at Randy and smiled, “Yes, he has a way of getting right to the point.” Then turning to Joel he asked, “What did the protester say?”

“He told me that I didn't understand the New Testament and that I have been misleading my Church.”

“Have you?”

“I don't think so.” Then Joel changed the subject. “Tell me something about yourself.”

“I'm Frank Hudson's father.”

Joel cast a surprised look at Randy then he looked back at Keith.

“Yes, Randy killed my son”. “I hated him for it, I was miserable. My pastor said it was just the devil accusing me and that I should just rebuke him and forget it.”

“That's for sure,” Joel proudly agreed. “That's what I've been telling my congregation. God doesn't want us to feel bad about the things we do. He isn't upset with us any more.”

Keith continued: “It didn't work. I had no peace”

Joel squirmed in his chair.

Keith noticed Joel's uneasiness so he paused, then continued, “I found that I was hiding from the chastisement of God because my heart was evil. God wanted me to forgive Randy, so I could be free. I finally gave up my private war when I realized that Randy wasn't the enemy. Yes, I was battling unseen enemies that I needed to defeat with spiritual weapons, and I was giving place to them with my unforgiveness.”

Joel blushed, remembering his discussion with Randy the night before.

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Keith looked at his watch, “We'd better go Randy, and we have a lot to do today.”

“Thanks for the coffee,” Joel gestured with his cup as Randy and Keith left.

I've heard enough about this subject Joel huffed as he finished his coffee and threw the cup in the trash.

Joel went back to the church troubled. That evening he went through the motions at the Wednesday night service but his mind was elsewhere.

~

After the service was over, he went home and sat in bed talking with his wife Karen. He fell back against the pillow and complained, “I'm tired, and I'm going to sleep early.” Karen pulled the covers over him, went out of the room and closed the door so he wouldn't be disturbed.

~

Joel drifted into a vivid dream. He was walking down a wide road in thick darkness. An eerie wind blew through him as strikes of lightning illuminated scenes of his life on the smoky mist that surrounded him. He laughed because it all seemed like a funny movie to him. Far in the distance, he saw a man sitting on a throne. He strained his eyes to see who it was, but he couldn't quite make out the features.

As he drew closer, a cold fear gripped him. “It can't be,” he shuttered, but Nevertheless, it was true; the man on the throne was Joel himself. Joel tried to retreat, but was blocked by a large angel.

The man on the throne followed Joel's every move and every thought with cold dark eyes of judgment and condemnation. A loud voice from heaven echoed the words that were engraved across the top of the throne:

***“Judge not, lest you be judged,
for by what measure you judge, you will be judged.”***

Joel fell to his knees. The voice thundered again, “God is the lawgiver and the only judge. You are not. Reach out to your enemies in love and forgiveness. Bring them deliverance from their sins and from the devil. That's what they really need. People need reconciliation, not condemnation.”

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Seeing himself as his own judge made Joel shake in horror. He realized that he was being judged in the same way he judged other people. “There must be some mistake,” Joel pleaded with the angel. “Christians don't come to judgment. I know the Word of God. I said the sinner's prayer. I've been born again. I'm a child of God.” He continued to protest, “I believe in Jesus. There is no condemnation to those who are in Jesus Christ.”

“True,” the angel agreed, “However, you are not walking in the Holy Spirit and you are not in Christ. You are a bastard, not a son. You have refused correction from everyone God sent to you. You had your last warning this afternoon.”

Joel writhed in bed screaming. Karen ran into the bedroom and shook him. He awoke soaked in sweat, his eyes bulging. He groped for her hand and pleaded. “Pray for me. I'm lost!”

~

After Joel calmed down, he went back to his office, sat at his desk and opened the desk drawer. There was a *W.W.J.D.* bracelet. He took it out of the drawer and put it on. *Yes, What Would Jesus Do?* “

He picked up the phone and called Jack Harvey. “Jack, I know it's late, but I have to talk with you.”

“Sure Joel, what's going on?”

Joel's words flowed with excitement. “Jack our petition is all wrong. We can't bomb Iran. In the Bible, Jesus was showing us that the new covenant was not just between God and us. It gives us a new spirit that also changes how we treat our enemies, a spirit that does not remember the sins of others. We are in the age of grace. If we want to war, we do not have the spirit of Christ, and we are still in the dark.”

“You're nuts!” Jack challenged, “Who's been brainwashing you? Some cult? We are duty bound to defend the oppressed and kill the enemies who are abusing them. Remember King David said that God taught his fingers to war.”

“Yes,” Joel agreed, “But that was the Old Testament. People battled against flesh and blood, against human enemies. Jesus changed that; he showed us that our war is really against evil spirits.”

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“Be sensible Joel. What about justice? If we do not judge others, who will administer justice? We would have anarchy and chaos. The Apostle Paul said that God ordains rulers as avengers of God against those who do evil.”

“Yes but Paul also says that we are not to avenge ourselves. So how can a Christian be in the position of an avenger?”

“Get a good night's sleep Joel. Things will be better in the morning. Good night and God bless you.”

Joel hung up the phone. He put his head down on the desk and thought about the last week and the people who had tried to show him the truth, Charlie, Randy and finally Keith. Then he turned on his computer and prepared his sermon for the coming Sunday.

10

The next Saturday night, Randy called Assad. “Would you like to continue our discussion? I talked to a preacher about it and he disagreed. It might be interesting to see what he preaches tomorrow.”

“Sure, I’ll meet you there.”

Randy gave him the address of the church and gloated in anticipation of what would happen the next day.

~

Sunday morning, after the praise band played some familiar songs, Joel came forward, leaned on the pulpit and lowered his head. The congregation wondered at his silence and the band stopped playing.

Finally, he raised his eyes and spoke in an unusually slow and deliberate voice: “Week before last, on the State Capitol steps, I silenced the voice of a man who was trying to wake me up. That man said that I didn’t know the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament. I thought he was a fool, but now I see that I was the fool. This past Wednesday night I had a dream that rocked my foundations. I want to tell it to you:”

“I was walking down a wide road...”

When he finished relating the dream he began to cry. “I have been blind but now I finally have eyes that see. I have been misleading you because I have been misled myself. We have been studying about how America was founded on a *Christian Worldview*. That is not true. Our founding fathers did not know what true Christianity is, and most of the church today does not know either.”

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“How unpatriotic of you!” a member of the congregation spoke out.

Another angry voice followed, and another, “This is not the kind of thing we pay you to preach.”

Neal Kinsey, one of the Church elders came up and warned Joel: “Pastor, you are out of line. America has a Godly government founded on Christian principles.”

“No,” Joel turned away, “We hate and kill just like the warring Muslims that we have hated, criticized and killed. “

“Arab Lover!” a voice shouted. Then another, until there was dissension all over the building and people began to leave.

Randy looked at Assad in disbelief.

Joel yelled Stop! “A true Christian Worldview would view the world as Christ views it seeing through his eyes and with his spirit. But the worldview we have been following would look like this:”

He turned the overhead on and showed a classic picture of Jesus with upraised hands surrounded by his worshiping disciples. Joel had modified the picture to show Jesus holding an automatic rifle in one hand and a grenade in the other. It was labeled *CHRIST OF THE WAR ON TERROR*.

The congregation was shocked and disgusted.

Joel pointed at the picture. “This is the Jesus that the *Christians for the Preservation of Israel*, and our country are serving, warring in the name of God. This is not the Jesus of the *Sermon on the Mount* who said to turn the other cheek, and to love our enemies.”

Sam Winston, another elder objected, “But God is using the war to make it easier for Christians to spread the Gospel in Iraq.”

“No,” Joel pleaded, “The church uses that to justify the war. If Jesus had the mind and the heart of the militant Christians of today, the Bible would read something like this.”

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He changed to another illustrated slide:

“Jesus called his disciples aside and gestured for them to sit under the shade of a palm tree since the sun was very hot.

‘My first thought was to send you out two by two as lambs among wolves to preach the Gospel but I'm having second thoughts about that. There are some things we must do first.’

‘What's that?’ Peter asked.

‘We must get rid of the wolves. The Sanhedrin and the Pharisees and the Roman government are corrupt. They are making ungodly laws. They need to be replaced before we can be effective. Get some of our people in office so we can clean up those organizations. Then we can preach without danger.’

‘What then?’ Matthew asked.

‘After my resurrection, we are going to have a big campaign in Rome. The Roman government doesn't like what we are doing so we need to do something there to pave the way for safe and effective evangelism.’

‘How will we do that, James and John asked. Call down fire from heaven?’

‘In a way,’ Jesus said with a grin, ‘The Roman government worships Caesar and a pantheon of gods and goddesses. They are mistreating their people. We have to put a stop to this. Assemble the zealots. They will know what to do. Have them bomb Rome, assassinate Caesar and then set up a government we can control. After you get the Roman Government cleaned up, then we can begin our work without fear of persecution. We will be more effective if we have no opposition from that ruthless government.’”

His sarcastic story over, Joel cried out, “Does this sound familiar? It is certainly not the Jesus of the New Testament. To say Jesus would speak this way would certainly be blasphemous, but for the most part, today's church

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is acting just as if Jesus had spoken those words.” Joel pointed into the camera and said, “Listen Dr. Jack Harvey, this is the false Jesus you are serving. Your dream of bombing nuclear plants in Iran is not an act of love. You must repent.”

Assad had tears in his eyes. *This man understands. I want to be like him,* Assad thought as he leaned his head down against the back of the empty chair in front of him.

Joel went on: “This great unseen sin of the church must be exposed, so we can repent of this evil. We focus on the sins of others. We campaign against those who commit sins we do not commit and we think we are holy and righteous.”

~

Betty Burns, the TV news director yelled, “Cut! Cut! My God! The entire program has gone out over the air. We should have caught it but Joel Prindell never has given us any problem before.” She ran to her news desk, switched off the camera link from the church, faced the newsroom camera and said, “We apologize that we are having technical difficulties. We will return to Joel Prindell's service as soon as the problem has been solved.” Then she switched to network programming. The television station was in panic and the studio phone began ringing off the wall as irate watchers voiced their disapproval that the station would let something like that go out over the network.

“We'll be sued!” Betty screamed, slapping her forehead and paced around the newsroom.

~

That night, Randy and his family were sitting in the kitchen eating supper when a flash of light broke through the window and the sound of an explosion rocked the quiet neighborhood. They ran out the front door and looked at the glow of a fire in the distance. *Prince of Peace Church*, Randy thought as he ran down the street to see what had happened.

Randy reached the church, made his way through burning rubble and walked through the blown out wall of Joel's office. Joel was trapped under a large wooden beam. Randy yelled for help. Several men, who had just arrived, lifted the beam and Randy pulled Joel free.

“Pastor Prindell” Randy cried. “I won't rest until I take out the terrorists

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who did this to you.”

“Let it go, Randy,” Joel mumbled as blood poured from his mouth. He grabbed Randy's arm and pulled him close. “Pray for them and forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

Joel's head fell limp as he died in Randy's arms.

~

The next morning revenge clouded Randy's mind as he tried to work. Keith noticed and walked up to Randy and handed him a cup of coffee, “I'm sorry about what happened to Joel. You must feel terrible.”

“Angry is more like it, real angry.”

Keith went right to the point, “Pray for the people who did this.”

Randy softly replied, “That's what Joel Prindell said as he died. But I don't feel like it. How can I do that? Why should I?”

Keith didn't have to answer. Randy turned away feeling empty inside, *Now I see what Mr. Hudson had to go through to be able to pray for me.*”

11

The Golden Goose was buzzing that evening as Randy scurried through the door. He found June, Tom and Billy Joe sitting at their usual table.

Randy demanded, “Who did the bombing?”

Tom was concerned and said, “Stay out of this Randy, you don't want to end up back in prison”.

Randy shouted. “Stay out of it? How can I? They are terrorists and must be stopped!”

People around them pretended not to hear what he was saying.

Billy Joe knew who did it but didn't want to set Randy off. Finally he said, “Talk is that it was the *Liberty Crusaders*.”

Randy jumped up. “Who are they?”

“They're a super-patriot group headquartered in Washington. They have a local chapter in a strip center on S. Broadway and La Harpe Blvd by the river.”

Randy started for the door. June ran ahead and blocked his exit. “Randy, it's a trap, stay here.”

“A trap?” Randy scoffed, “They don't know me. “

June cried as she grabbed him by the arm. “I'm not talking about the *Liberty Crusaders*. “I mean a trap the devil has set to keep you from getting the

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spiritual freedom that you are getting so close to seeing.”

“June I know you mean well, but this is something I have to do.” Randy took her hand from his arm. Then he jumped on his motorcycle and roared off. June ran after him screaming, “Randy, Stop! Stop!”

~

Maybe my gun is still in the attic Randy remembered. He raced home. A note in the kitchen said, “We’ve gone shopping.” *Good, they’re not here,* Randy was relieved. He pulled down the stairs to the attic and scampered up the ladder. His .38 special snub-nosed revolver was still there in a plastic bag where he had left it, nestled under the insulation. He checked to make sure it was loaded, stuck it in his pocket and headed for the river district.

~

The streets were wet as Randy pulled into the parking lot of the strip shopping center. The storefronts were dark except for one that had two American flags draped in the windows and *Liberty or Death* painted on the door.

He silently opened a door and crept down a hallway towards the voices of two men who were sitting at a table, playing cards.

“Well, well, look who’s here” The man on the opposite side of the table said. “Why are you alone Randy? You didn’t bring your gang. You all would be welcome here.”

Randy was surprised that they knew who he was but since crime was their passion, they would know the criminals in town.

A diabolical smirk came across Randy’s face. “I have a message from Pastor Joel Prindell.” He pulled the revolver from his pocket and pointed it at them.

“Now you’re not being very friendly the other man chided as he loosed a large dog that ran out from under the table and charged Randy. Randy fired. The dog yelped and rolled over in a clump.

“Now look at what you’ve gone and done” the first man uttered a mock whimper as he pushed his chair back. “I liked that dog.”

“Stay Put” Randy ordered turning his gun back on the men. He started to

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fire, but his unexpected pardon and the face of Joe Jameson, the man on the bus, came to Randy's mind. His heart raced with the words, *“I loved you and forgave you when you were my enemy. This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you.”*

He began to sob, slowly dropping his gun.

The man closest to Randy took advantage of the situation. He picked up a pipe from the floor and rushed Randy, driving the pipe hard into his ribs as he laughed; “And we have a message for you.” Randy dropped the gun and doubled over, gasping for breath. The man swung the pipe into Randy's face breaking his nose and sending him reeling into a pile of folding chairs.

Randy raised himself up onto one elbow. He could barely see the men because of the blood in his eyes. He pointed his finger at them and said, “The message is ... Pastor Prindell forgives you.” Then he passed out.

The men dragged him out the front door and threw him out onto the street, then knocked his motorcycle over to make it look like he had an accident. Then they went back inside laughing.

~

Meanwhile, June drove through the heavy rain worrying about what Randy may be doing. As she pulled into the shopping center, the lights of her car reflected off a motorcycle and next to it she saw a figure lying face down in the road. She got out of her car and spotted a night watchman asleep in a chair in the doorway of a building a few doors down. “Please help me!” she shouted startling the man out of his slumber. He ran over and helped her lift Randy into the passenger seat of her car.

She sped to the emergency room and walked alongside as attendants put him on a stretcher and carried him inside.

After an hour a doctor came down the hall to the waiting room. “He'll be fine. He has several cracked ribs, a broken nose and a concussion; we'll keep him under observation tonight.” A nurse came in, “We have him in a room now if you would like to see him.”

In the room, June found Randy's parent's phone number in his wallet and called them. She pulled up a chair close to his bed. “Hey sleepyhead?”

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Randy turned to her. "Revenge is not sweet, it is very bitter," he groaned. "Thanks for taking care of me."

She bent down and kissed him on the forehead.

~

Thirty minutes later, as a nurse had just began to take his blood pressure, came in and checked his blood pressure, the door burst open and Peggy ran into the room screaming hysterically, "My boy, my boy, I told him not to get into trouble. Is he all right?" Greg followed trying to calm her down.

"It's OK Mom." I must have fallen off my bike," Randy laughed. Then he grabbed his ribs and yelled, "Oh that hurt."

"You all need to leave now and give him some rest," the nurse said as she escorted them into the hallway.

~

The next morning the doctor came into the room, looked at Randy's chart and checked the dilation of his eyes. "Everything is normal Randy. The concussion is better. You can go home after lunch, but take it easy for a few days."

"Thanks Doc. I will," Randy promised.

He called his mother to ask her to come get him at noon then he fell back asleep.

After they got home, Peggy said "I fixed the sofa bed in the den for you so you won't have to climb stairs. Dad put your bike back in the shed."

"Randy kissed her, leaned back on the sofa and took a nap.

~

An hour later, Greg answered a knock on the door. It was Charlie.

"How is Randy?"

"Come in, I'm sure he'd like to see you."

"Hey Bro, what happened?"

"I just couldn't do it," Randy cried. "Joel knew I'd go after them. He told

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me to let it go and forgive them.”

“What stopped you?”

“I looked at those men, and thought about my undeserved pardon from prison. And an inner voice reminded me that God forgave me when I didn't deserve it. My anger went away. I couldn't shoot.”

“You did the right thing, you're free now.”

“*Free*”, Randy repeated, “*finally free*” then he fell off to sleep.”

12

The nervous elders from the church gathered early Monday morning to make arrangements for Jim's funeral. Neal broke the silence. "Until last Sunday, I would have known what to say about Joel Prindell. But after his sermon... I don't even know the man."

"Why don't we just have an open microphone?" Stan Smith suggested.

"Good idea," Neal said with a sigh of relief. "I'll say an opening prayer and then the people can speak. It's set for Wednesday for ten in the morning. See you there."

~

As soon as Betty Burns found out about the funeral, she walked into the office of Fred Anderson, the manager of the television station. "Fred, what should I do? The bombing was such a big news event. People will be expecting us to cover the funeral because we have always broadcasted his services. But after what he did last Sunday and the bombing, it's dangerous."

"Joel's not going to cause us trouble today," Fred replied caustically. "Go ahead and cover it. Play it up."

~

Wednesday morning Joel's wife Karen and their two children sat on the front row of the large viewing room. People started to come in, passed by the casket and gave their condolences to the family.

Neal Kinsey, Stan Smith, and the other elders sat on the front row on the other side of the aisle from Karen and her children.

Greg, Peggy and Randy had just gotten out of the car when they saw June

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and Assad. They all walked in together, signed the guest register and sat in the back.

Randy saw Keith and Alice sitting in the front. Charlie, dressed in his usual fatigues, came in and sat next to Randy. Peggy punched Greg and motioned her head towards Charlie, "Look at him, he's a disgrace. Imagine coming to a funeral dressed like that." As the final few people were seated, an organist began playing hymns. Neal mustered his best sympathetic smile, went over to Joel's wife, patted her hand and smiled at her kids.

In the rear of the viewing room, Betty stood before the live camera and said, "We are here at *Restful Gardens Funeral Home* for the service for Pastor Joel Prindell of *Prince of Peace Christian Church*."

The cameras switched to Neal who had walked up to the lectern. "This morning we pay our respects to pastor Joel Prindell," Neal mumbled piously, "a man who died so tragically Monday night. Pastor Prindell served us faithfully for so many years until his recent mental breakdown. Neal bowed his head and asked the audience. Please pray *The Lord's Prayer* with me...

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name.
Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into
temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen."

Neal stepped away from the microphone and gestured, "The microphone is open for any of you who would like to express your feelings at this time."

He sat in a nearby chair on the stage and fidgeted as he waited to see what the people who had come would say. Some people were angry because of what Joel had said the previous Sunday. Some were afraid to speak because they knew that the service was being televised and were afraid of what might happen to them if they showed support for Joel.

After he waited to see if some else would speak, Keith came up to the microphone. He looked at Karen Prindell. "Mrs. Prindell, my name is Keith Hudson. I am so sorry about your loss. I only met Joel last week, but

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the sermon he preached Sunday was very close to my heart, and I'd like to speak some words that I believe would reflect what he might say if he was able to speak.”

Karen cried and bowed her head.

Then addressing the audience, Keith began, “You all just recited *'The Lord's Prayer'*. It is a nice custom that many pray at occasions like this because it gives a sense of comfort. But did you really mean the words as a prayer? Think about what you have just asked God to do. You have asked him to forgive your trespasses in the same way that you forgive the trespasses of others. That prayer is from the Bible, Matthew chapter six.” He opened his Bible. “Let me read you the next two verses:

'For if ye forgive man their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you.'

Keith paused before continuing

“ But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Farther forgive your trespasses.”

Neal and Stan grew nervous as the crowd talked with each other, surprised at what they had heard.

“We all like to rejoice and talk about how God has forgiven all our sins, but if we do not forgive others no matter what they have done to us, we are deluded and are banking on wishful foolish thinking if we think God will forgive our sins. That is a tough saying, but Jesus makes that clear.

Keith paused.

“We must go beyond just receiving pardon from God. After we receive his pardon, we will extend pardon to others if we have the Spirit of God in our hearts. If we don't want to do that, its because we have not repented and we have not been born again of his spirit.”

The nervous crowd grumbled.

Keith continued, “I have no doubt that Joel Prindell forgave the people who

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blew him up, and that he didn't die in bitterness. Lest you misunderstand, Joel's purpose in his sermon on Sunday was not to condemn, but to exhort people to come to Jesus and ask him of his ways.”

Keith looked at Alice then turned back to the rest of the, “How far do we go? If the memory of an offence causes us pain, it shows that we have not really forgiven.”

Keith walked back to his seat.

Assad came forward. “My name is Assad Ahmad. I am a Moslem from Palestine, the West Bank, as you call it. My brother died in Israel last week. He was a suicide bomber.”

The crowd gasped. The elders were nervous.

“My brother killed and died for his God and country. Just like your soldiers kill and die for their God and their country. It may not be the same God or the same country, but the killing and dying are the same.”

The elders shuffled in their chairs and cast worried looks at each other as Assad continued.

“I thought Christianity was supposed to be different than Islam. I read in your Bible that your leader Jesus said to love and forgive your enemies, but what I have seen Christians do and what they say on television had convinced me that all Christians were hypocrites. That is until I heard Joel Prindell last Sunday. What Joel preached and what Mr. Hudson just said, has shown me what a real Christian is. I want to be like them. You should too.”

After Assad returned to his seat, Randy came forward and stood behind the lectern. He took the microphone from the stand, looked around and began. “I see that none of you fine church people have anything good to say about Pastor Prindell. So I'll say my piece. If you don't like it, you can leave, just like you did last Sunday when Pastor Prindell told you the truth.”

The crowd was as silent as the man in the casket.

“I want to set something straight,” Randy said staring at Neal. “Joel

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Prindell did not have a mental breakdown. I'm no religious person, but I think that he just finally got his right mind, a mind we all need."

Pointing at Neal and then to the other elders on the front row he said calmly and deliberately. "You turned on Joel last Sunday when he finally preached a message that meant something. I want to have that love that Joel had, but I doubt that I will find out how to get it from you, because you obviously don't have it to offer."

Randy continued, "As most of you know I'm Randy Whitaker, the son of Greg and Peggy Whitaker. Many of you know that I was recently pardoned and released from the State Prison." Then pointing to Keith and Alice with tears in his eyes, Randy cried out "for killing their son Frank."

The crowd squirmed as they whispered to one another. Peggy was embarrassed.

"I'm pretty stupid and stubborn, but I see that God has kept me alive so that I can repent and come to Him. I conned the chaplain in the prison, told him I was saved, and put on a good front, maybe that's why they let me out. But a person doesn't have to be in a prison to do that. I'm sure some of you know what I am talking about. The devil made my bitterness seem so right, but it ate me up. God sent many people to me to show me that I needed to turn around. Maybe it finally got through to me."

"Keith just spoke some words to you. You can take them to the bank, because Keith not only knows them. He lives them. He has shown me what being a real Christian is. He not only forgave me but also went on beyond pardoning me to reaching out to me in love and helping me start a new life."

He took a deep breath and regained his composure. " Keith is right. I saw Joel Prindell die. His last words were 'Pray for them and forgive them, for they know not what they do.' But hate filled my bones and I wanted to revenge his death. I tracked down the bombers and was going to kill them, but Jesus spoke to my heart and said *I forgave you when you were my enemy, Love one another as I have loved you.* That stopped me cold. Then one of the people I wanted to kill beat me with a pipe, knocking me unconscious."

Pointing to the casket, Randy continued, "Joel touched on a taboo subject,

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'Should Christians Love their Enemies?' And now he has gone to be with Jesus. I suppose the question is what will we do with the message he gave us."

Then putting the microphone down he said, "That's all I have to say."

Charlie Hathaway sat quietly. He had tears in his eyes and smiled as Randy sat down next to him.

Neal, trembling, walked back to the microphone and asked if anyone else had anything to say.

Thankful that no one else came forward, he motioned to the funeral director who solemnly closed the casket and the people walked out of the room without speaking.

After the service was over. Neal caught up with Randy in the parking lot. "You must think you are something now that you've turned out to be a clone of Joel Prindell. A traitor."

Usually by now, Randy would be railing, but now he said quietly "Joel was a patriot of another kingdom."

Neal scoffed and walked off.

Randy was getting into his parent's car when Alice Hudson ran up to him crying.

"Randy, I want to get on with my life, it's been on hold for the last ten years. I let bitterness control me. You asked me to forgive you. I do with all my heart. I'd like to be your friend. I'm finding out that we all need each other."

"Thanks," Randy said with tears in his eyes. Your friendship would mean a lot to me."

They hugged each other. It hurt his ribs, but it felt so good.

13

Later that afternoon, in the Oval Office Secretary of Defense Norm Randolph handed President Lowery a DVD. “J.W. you have to watch this. It's a sermon by Joel Prindell, some crazy preacher in Arkansas. He was part of *Christians for the Preservation of Israel*, the group that you spoke to here in Washington last week.”

J.W. looked at the disk skeptically, “What's so interesting about it?”

“The pastor renounced his membership in that group, and preached an anti war sermon that was nationally televised. The next evening, his church was bombed and he was killed by a paramilitary organization. His funeral had some interesting speeches. There's some Moslem guy involved too.”

J.W. poured a cup of coffee, walked up to the media console, put the DVD on and leaned back in his chair.

After the DVD was finished, J.W. paced in clammy silence. He walked over and gazed out the window. He had seen many controversial clips before, but this one brought to his mind things that he had been trying to suppress for a long time. *I talk a good talk, J.W. mused, but something is wrong. If that man Hudson and that preacher Prindell had Christianity, what do I have?*

As We Forgive, J.W. whispered, remembering Keith's sermon. Tears came to his eyes as he thought about how hardened he was, and how so far away he was from bearing the true fruits of a Christian. The conviction made him shudder. *Prindell was right, he concluded. I've just been following so much vain tradition. We all have. My War on terror is wrong. We are fighting the wrong enemies. I have to do something. I can't keep going this way. If*

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we really have the life of Christ in us we will lay down all of our rights, not defend them and not kill for them.

He bowed his head and asked Jesus to deliver him of his hardness of heart, and to change him into the person he should be. His resolution was to be immediately tested.

~

A blinding light stabbed through the windows, followed immediately by a shock wave that collapsed the White House library, knocking J.W. to the ground. He lay on his back, unconscious under a cascade of books and rubble.

J.W. came to and struggled to free his arm to get to his ringing cell phone.

The voice on the phone said, “Mr. President, the Pentagon has been destroyed. It was nuclear, evidently a small one or you wouldn't be talking to me.”

The Secret Service rushed into the room with some emergency DEMRON™ HAZMAT suits. One of them cleared the debris off of J.W. and helped him get into his gear while the others suited up. J.W. was shaken but unharmed. They led him to *Marine One* helicopter where his wife Cindy, the Vice President Gene Gaston and Gene's wife Maureen were waiting. After he was on board, they headed for *Air Force One*.

The cloud of debris over the Pentagon dissipated revealing a cavern and vapor where once there had been buildings, men and a lazy river.

Once aboard *Air Force One*, they hurriedly had J.W. shower and began treating him with Potassium Iodide.

The cabinet members arrived moments later and the plane lifted off, heading west. The remaining passengers began their treatment.

J.W. wasted no time. He came on the air and addressed the nation and the world.

“The Pentagon has been destroyed, the White House was badly damaged along with much of the surrounding area. We do not know the extent yet, but it was a small nuclear bomb. I urge all people in Washington DC to

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cooperate with the *Homeland Security* workers who will take you to safety and treat you for nuclear exposure.”

J.W. paused and the country held its breath as they waited to hear what he would say.

His words began to flow as if they were the words of a different man:

“This is a moment of destiny; a time for Christians in our country to be a strong witness of the love of Christ to the world, instead of behaving just like the rest of the world behaves. I don't know who did this terrible thing to us. You will have to answer to God for it, not to me. As a Christian, I realize that it's not for me to judge you. I do not condemn you. I will not retaliate. But you must come to Jesus and ask forgiveness for what you have done. Go and sin no more. God help us all. Thank you.”

~

Randy and his parents were in the den watching J.W.'s broadcast. Peggy screamed “My Lord,” he's gone crazy. Joel and Neal told us to vote for J.W. because God had a purpose for him to be our President. But now look at him. He's just like Joel Prindell. It's a plague!” Randy just sat watching and listening in amazement.

~

As soon as J.W.'s address was over, Secretary of Defense Randolph called him on his cell phone, “Mr. President please tell me you were knocked senseless in the blast.”

“No Norm, I've never been more sane.”

“What happened? I thought we were together on everything.”

“We were, until I watched that DVD you gave me. It opened my eyes to the Truth and settled something that has been bothering me deep inside for a long time.”

“J.W., that guy on the DVD was insane!”

“No, he just took what Jesus said to heart. I am going to do the same because I cannot go on living in hypocrisy.”

Norm continued to object.

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J.W. said, "Norm, I have to go," and hung up the phone.

J.W. called the Director of *Homeland Security*. "What are the casualties?"

"We don't know yet sir. Fortunately the Congress and Senate were not in session so most of them were out of the city."

"Where are you?"

"In a shelter. We are bringing evacuees here for decontamination."

"How did the bomb get inside the Pentagon?"

"We believe that it was detonated outside, towards Arlington Cemetery."

"Keep me informed." J.W. said as he set the phone down.

~

Norm Randolph wasted no time. He called Vice President Gaston.

"Gene you had better do something before the world comes apart at the seams. J.W. has gone berserk."

"Don't worry, I'll take care of this." Gene assured, as he walked over and sat by J.W.

"Mr. President, you must apologize. Say that you over reacted. Say that you were in shock."

"You don't understand do you Gene? This is a serious matter."

"Yes it's serious, but you're the one that doesn't see it. Are you on drugs or something?"

"No." he said quietly, "I just said what needed to be said." Then he looked out the window.

Air Force One headed for *Washington II*, the nuclear hardened underground emergency headquarters in Wyoming. Other planes carrying military officials and the surviving members of the congress and senate also

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hastened to the hardened site. They were all there by the evening.

~

Israel's Prime Minister Samuel Goldberg called Jack Harvey in a panic. "Your foolish president has placed us at great risk. Why did he change? He was a great supporter of us at the rally."

Jack sweated, "Samuel I can insure you that J.W. said does not reflect the will of the American People. We have not changed our commitment to protect you. Trust me. I will get this worked out."

Al Queda, who would normally have made a statement claiming responsibility, was silent and puzzled.

In Palestine Amira and Hazem Ahmad sat in their kitchen watching the news with their son Assad. He had just arrived, having flown home to grieve with his family over the loss of his brother Abdullah.

Hazem asked Assad, "This speech, the United States president made. Was he honest in what he said?"

"He seems to be," Assad said, "but his is only one voice. The rest of the government will not do what he wants."

"Are there Christians who are like the ones he talks about?" Amira asked. "Is it possible to really forgive and love your enemies?"

"I did meet two people in America. One man named Keith Hudson forgave a young man who had killed his son. Keith loved and cared for the young man like a son. And there was another man, Joel Prindell, a preacher who forgave those who killed him. There may be more. I want to be like them."

"That would be good," Hazem agreed. "But how can it be done?"

"The pastor who was killed said that it wasn't by following rules and regulations," Assad told his father as they continued their meal. "It can only happen in the hearts of each person as he asks God for forgiveness of his sins and Jesus does a work to change a person's heart."

~

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Early Thursday morning, Barry Wentworth, the Republican Congressman from Texas, was talking to his wife and children assuring them that he was all right in *Washington II* when the call-interrupt beeped. “Barry, this is Jack Harvey, the annoyed voice announced.”

Clicking back to the other line, Barry said, “Dear, I have to go. We can talk later.”

“What's on your mind Jack, as if I didn't know.”

“I warned you this would happen. This is why we have been pushing you guys to make a strike on Iran's nuclear plants. Now do you believe me?”

“OK, you made your point.”

“Prime Minister Sam Goldberg from Israel is chewing my ear off. His people are terrified after what J.W. said. I am going to e-mail you an official request that you impeach J.W.”

“Yours won't be the first I get and won't be the last.” Barry lamented. “We have declared an emergency session and will meet in the morning.”

“Good, impeach J.W. now so Gene can take over and straighten things out. Don't mess this up.”

Jack fired off an email *Impeach*. Barry was not surprised by what it said:

“I, Jack Harvey, on behalf of *Christians for the Preservation of Israel*, do formally request that an indictment for High Treason and Misdemeanor be charged against President J.W. Lowery for shirking his duty as Commander and Chief of the United States.”

Barry forwarded it to the members of the *House Judiciary Committee* who then passed it on to the *Subcommittee on the Constitution*.

The process usually took days or weeks but it took only two hours before the Subcommittee prepared the *Articles of Impeachment* and forwarded it to the *Full Judiciary Committee*. Their vote was unanimous so the articles were forwarded to Walt Trimble, the Chairman of the *House of Representatives*.

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Walt wasted no time and since all congressmen would be in the *Washington II* complex the next morning, he called for an emergency assembly for then.

~

The room was noisy and crowded, not like it was in the spacious room on Capitol Hill. Walt opened the session and counted 406 members present, so he began by asking if there was a formal request for indictment.

Walt read the *Article of Impeachment* that the Subcommittee had prepared:

“We the congress of the United States do hereby charge J.W. Lowery, President of the United States, with High Treason and Misdemeanor in that by public statement he has betrayed the trust given to him, has shown himself unfit to be Commander and Chief of the Armed Forces of the United States, and has given comfort and support to the enemies of the United States in time of War thus greatly undermining our National Defense effort.”

Walt called for discussion. For a while, everyone was silent. Finally Congressman Jacob Riley, Democrat from Massachusetts, spoke up. “What President Lowery did was strange, but wonderfully strange. I admire his courage and agree with what he said.”

The rest of the congressional body grew cold. Walt Trimble ignored the comment and asked, “Do I have a motion for a vote to accept the *Article of Impeachment* as written?”

“So moved” Barry stated soberly.

“Cast your ballots.” Walt instructed.

Jacob Riley cast the one dissenting vote.

Walt declared the proceedings done and e-mailed the Articles to Chief Justice Gordon Byron, who called the senate to meet at 1:00 PM that afternoon and delivered the *Article of Impeachment* and a summons to President Lowery.

~

Chief Justice Byron gavelled the court to session and read the charges. Then he addressed J.W. “Mr. President, you were out of line when you

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represented America as a Christian nation. Our nation was never meant to be that. Do you wish to withdraw your speech that you made after the bombing?"

"I do not wish to withdraw what I said, your honor, and with all due respect, I did not say that America was a Christian nation." J.W. stated humbly. "I thought it was, but I didn't really understand what Christianity was. I see now that my *War on Terror* was misdirected. Our enemies are spiritual, not people. We cannot destroy terror by killing human enemies and war can't bring true liberty to people. Only Jesus Christ can liberate people. Liberty only comes when a person repents of their sins and trusts Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior."

"Don't preach to us. Justice Byron admonished. The Church and Christianity is not on trial here Mr. President. You are."

"Yes, I am on trial. But the false church and false Christianity is on trial." J.W. insisted. "True Christians are followers of Christ. They are dead to the things of the world. They have nothing left to guard or fight for except for their soul. They are ambassadors from a foreign kingdom. They offer forgiveness, peace, and love to everyone."

Justice Byron slammed the gavel down. "Stop your raving! You were sworn to uphold justice"

J.W. replied, "Yes I was, but I am no longer in the kingdom of the world. I will leave administration of justice for others. I am called to administer reconciliation, mercy, and unconditional forgiveness."

"I think we have heard enough of your preaching." Justice Byron sighed. "Is there anything else you offer in your defense?"

"No, I won't waste any more of your time" J.W. said raising his hand and lowering his head in submission. "I am guilty of the charges you have brought against me. I can no longer uphold the constitution and ask congress to declare war, so I cannot continue as *President and Commander and Chief*."

The court looked at each other dumbfounded at J.W.'s open admission of guilt.

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After a brief consultation, the court made a quick decision. Judge Byron said grimly, “Mr. Lowery, we find you guilty of a High Treason and Misdemeanor. You no longer are President of the United States.”

“Traitor, Coward!” multitudes of voices jeered as J.W. walked out of the room and out into the hallway where his wife Cindy was waiting.

“She put her hand on his shoulder and kissed him on the cheek. “It's over dear,” she said softly. “Let's go back home to Oklahoma.”

A guard escorted them out of the complex.

Back in the courtroom, the mood in the lightened as the focus shifted to the swearing in of Gene Gaston as the new president.

“I will not be a weak willed coward such as J.W. Lowery turned out to be,” Gaston promised as his wife Maureen stood by his side. “As President of the United States, I will complete the job that J.W. started and deserted, the job to rid the world of terrorism.”

The Senators sang Hail to the Chief and congratulated President Gaston.

~

The aftermath of the bombing of Washington was devastating, but was not as bad as it could have been. People were surprised but not shocked. Tears were shed, prayers were spoken, and *Homeland Security* was praised for their preparedness to handle such an attack. The casualties were presented as a matter of statistics. One thousand people were killed, five thousand had radiation sickness and ten thousand had lesser injuries.

Most people were furious at J.W., and didn't want to remember him. Churches across America held prayer vigils for those who were injured in the bombing. A nervous state of normality returned to the nation. A few churches took the bombing and what J.W. said as a wake up call and repented, but most of the church went back to sleep.

14

Randy rested until Saturday morning. After breakfast, he told Peggy “Mom I'm getting away for the day, don't wait up for me. “

“Be careful son, you know your ribs aren't healed yet.”

“Thanks mom,” Randy kissed her cheek and walked outside.

The morning air was brisk as Randy rode his motorcycle down the interstate to Pine Bluff and turned off onto the road that led to the Prison.

He parked and walked into the visitor center.

He pressed the button on the intercom box. “I'm Randy Whitaker. I'd like to see the warden if I could.”

“Just a moment, I'll see if he is available,” the voice in the speaker announced.

Five minutes later, the warden came out to the gate and said, “I'm not surprised to see you Randy. Would you like to come into my office?”

“Yes sir, I'd like to talk with you.”

The warden offered Randy a chair and asked, “What's on you mind?”

“You were right. I did con the Chaplain. I wanted to come back and apologize for the way I treated you. Guess I really belong in this place.”

The Warden listened attentively.

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Randy continued, “The day I was released, I met another man you released the same day.”

“Joe Jameson?”

“Yes, I wish I was like him.”

The Warden looked at Randy for a while and then said soberly, “You are. I saw you on television speaking at Joel Prindell's funeral. “You have learned your lesson ... Now get out of here!” he laughed gruffly.

“Can I have that handshake I refused last time?”

“Gladly,” the warden said extending his hand.

The warden watched out the window as Randy walked to his motorcycle and rode off into the distance. He nodded his head as he thought; *there goes a truly reformed man.*

~

On the way home that afternoon, as Randy neared Little Rock, he thought, I need to see Mike. He headed west on I-630 and after eating some pizza at *Nicholi's Pizzeria*. He continued on to I-430 and stopped at the *Brown Bean coffee shop*. He ordered a coffee and asked for Mike. The counter attendant went back to the office where Mike was ordering some supplies. Mike followed her and shivered when he saw Randy standing there.

“Can we talk?” Randy asked.

Mike hesitated. Then hoping to avoid a scene, he suggested, “OK Randy, come back into my office.”

“A table will be fine,” Randy said meekly.

Mike was cautious but pointed to a table in the corner. They sat and Randy looked down at the table, “Mike, I don't know where to begin. I can't believe what I did to you.”

“The stitches are out,” Mike said holding up his chin.” “I've had worse than this in our fights before.”

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“I’m sorry Mike,” Randy answered, looking up. “Thank you for testifying against me.”

“What???” Mike was blown away.

“I see now that what you did was one of the best things that ever happened to me.”

“Randy, I heard what you said at the funeral. Now that I see you, I believe you meant what you said, Mike said as he handed Randy one of his business cards. “Give me a call when you can come over. My wife’s a good cook.”

“I’d like that”, Randy said as he finished his coffee.

~

Randy continued north on I-430 and cut to the right on Cantrell Road. He looped to the north, and then cut back again. His heart jumped. There it was, *Allsopp Park*. He pulled into the park and stopped at the fateful spot where memories of the killing flooded him once again.

~

“Randy!” A voice that called from the playground pulled him from his daydream. “I told you we’d see each other again.” Randy looked over and saw Joe Jameson pushing a little girl on a swing. “This is my niece Tanya,” Joe boasted. “Some good things happened while I was gone.”

Randy got off the bike and walked over to the swings. “I’ve thought about you a lot,” Randy smiled.

“Ain’t that something? I’ve been praying for you,”

Randy gave Tanya a push then gave Joe a hug. “Thanks, for everything.”

“Maybe we’ll see each other again” Joe grinned.

“Hope so,” Randy laughed as he walked back to his bike and rode home with better memories.

~

When he opened the front door, Randy heard music coming from the garage. He found Greg working on his truck listening to *Saturday in the Park* by Chicago:

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“People talking, really smiling, a man playing guitar, singing for us all. Will you help him change the world? Can you dig it? Yes I can and I’ve been waiting for such a long time, for today.”

“Hi dad, what's going on?”

“Putting new wires on this old truck. Maybe it will stop missing.”

“You like Chicago, don't you.”

“Yes, the horns are so great.”

“I mean the words.”

Greg stopped and listened as the music continued: *“People reaching, people touching, a real celebration waiting for us all, if we want it, really want it Can you dig it? Yes I can, and I've been waiting for such a long time, for the day,”*

“That was a long time ago son” Greg lamented. “Another lifetime.”

“Why did you give up the cause?”

“What cause?”

“Peace and Love.”

“You're a fine one to talk about that!”

“I want to change, dad.”

“I wanted to change too, back then, but it didn't happen.

“But why did you give up hope? What you wanted was good. I see that now.”

“Flower Power was a fantasy, the movement withered and died. The drugs and music didn't deliver what we hoped for. I got drafted. Vietnam did me in. It was no walk in the park. Chicago died to me that year.”

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“And you gave up?”

“Yep. I didn't care any more. You will lose your fire too, in time. It feels great in the beginning, like a honeymoon, but the cause will go away.”

“I don't think so Dad. I have no illusions that I am in control of anything.”

“Maybe you can do what I never could.”

“No, not me, but Jesus in me can and will.”

Greg started the truck. “There...that sounds better.”

The radio was playing a different song now.

~

Randy rode over to the bookstore where June worked. She smiled and waved as she saw him, then she continued waiting on the customers. Randy browsed around the store until her break time.

~

June found Randy and suggested, “Let's go to the bookstore café and get some coffee.”

The line for coffee was long because an old man was having a hard time deciding what he wanted. Randy grew impatient and irritated. Eventually the man made his decision and fumbled around in his pockets for some money. Randy said under his breath as the man took his coffee and left the counter. *It's about time; we don't have all day.* The man smiled at Randy as he walked by. Randy, embarrassed, prayed “Sorry, Lord, forgive me.” Then he thought, *if I can't put up with a small aggravation like this, how can I love my enemies?* The Holy Spirit spoke to his heart. “*I'm working on you, haven't finished yet.*” Randy and June took their coffee outside and sat on the front steps watching the setting sun creep shadows towards them from across the street.

“It's been a good day,” Randy said as he turned to June, took her hand and smiled.

15

The next day, Sunday morning In Texas, Jack Harvey walked onto the stage of his church and stood looking at the Jewish Star of David flag, the American Flag, and the Christian Church flag that were the trademark of his ministry. He walked over to the pulpit, lowered his head and groaned, *so much has happened*. Then he raised his head and faced the empty sanctuary thinking how in less than an hour, over five thousand people would be sitting before him, eager for answers, hanging on his every word. He pondered *could Prindell have been right? Could that man at the funeral be right? Could J.W. be right? Could the rest of the church be deceived, and a handful of Jesus Freaks have the answer to questions that had been so carefully debated by so many wise theologians for so many centuries?* People started to come into the sanctuary. A sudden chill fell upon him as he stared out at the congregation and wondered, *What if I'm wrong?*

~

At that same moment, at a nuclear power plant in Bushehr Iran, ten men stood in front of a control board. Five men were two floors below with Hazmat suits carefully putting some spent nuclear fuel in lead containers. Fifteen others were having lunch in a cafeteria. One man was proudly showing a friend a picture of his wife and their new baby. A woman was on her cell phone, listening to her son brag about winning a soccer game. Suddenly a missile streaked down from the sky and a flash that they did not see or hear vaporized them all.

***Words to Consider
From the Bible***

- 1. Licensed to Kill**
- 2. An Unexpected Pardon**
Romans 5:10, 1; John 4:19, : John 15:12,: Matthew 5:38,39;43-48)
- 3. Coming Home**
- 4. Another Chance**
- 5. The Same Old Song**
.Matthew 5:21,22
- 6. Reflections**
II Corinthians 10:3,4; Ephesians 4:31,32; Ephesians 6:10-12; Romans 3:10
- 7. Through Moslem Eyes**
John 5:13; Luke 6:46
- 8. Doubletalk**
Luke 18:9-14, Ezekiel 36:26
- 9. Lest Ye Be Judged**
Matthew 7:1-5; Luke 6:35-38; Hebrews 12:5-15; Romans 8: 6-14;
Romans 2:1-8; James 2:5-13. Romans 12:17-13:7; 2 Corinthians 10:3
- 10. Christ of the War on Terror**
Luke 23:34
- 11. The Bitterness of Revenge**
John 13:34, John 15:9-12 ,John 8:36
- 12. As We Forgive**
Matthew 6:9-15; Colossians 1:13
- 13. The Price of Resolution**
Mark 8:35; John 8:10,11, 2 Corinthians 5:14-21
- 14. Unfinished Business**
Romans 8:3,4; 1 John 1:6-9
- 15. The Beat goes on**

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Final Thoughts

“Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets. But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not to take thy coat also.

Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again. And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise. For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again.

But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.

And he spake a parable unto them, Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch? The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye? neither how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye. For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. For every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh. And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?

Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like: He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that.” The words of Jesus in Luke 6:27-49