



The Cost of Forgiveness

... a new kind of love

by Ron Decuir

THE COST OF FORGIVENESS *a new kind of love*

Foreword:

This is a difficult story to write. It goes against the grain of our society. And in doing so, it challenges the ideals of many well meaning people. Of the men and women who fight in the armed services of all of the countries of the world. And of the families, friends and fellow patriots who support and pray for their success in doing what they believe in their hearts and souls to be the right and noble thing to do in the cause of establishment of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

My purpose is not to condemn, but rather to exhort people to come to Jesus Christ and to ask him of his ways.

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The Cost of Forgiveness

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1

For Randy Whittiker it was a day like all days as he sat in the prison cafeteria eating lunch and watching the noon news on the wall mounted television set.

The news showed a war correspondent in Baghdad down on one knee, interviewing a young soldier who was lying on a stretcher holding his bandaged leg. The soldier moaned into the microphone, "My buddy and I were on patrol looking for terrorists. I kicked in the door of a darkened house and we began our search. Flashes from an automatic weapon and a burning in my leg gripped me as bullets ripped through my flesh. I returned fire, nailing the terrorist. He spun around, fell against the wall, dropped his gun and slid to the floor. His family huddled in a corner screaming. When he fell, they rushed over to him, weeping over his lifeless body. My buddy dragged me out and helped me to a medic." The soldier raised his hand and shouted, "God Bless America!"

"God Bless America Indeed!" The correspondent beamed. "We salute you. You truly exemplify the self-sacrificing spirit that our country was founded upon." He stood up and turned towards the camera. "We now return you to the local news."

~

Randy jumped up from his seat, strode around the room ranting "Can you believe that? A punk like me goes to prison for killing someone 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.

Randy walked up to the TV, raised a fist and beckoned to the correspondent, "Come on dude, interview me. I'll tell you my story."

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 Impala SS, when their rival gang the Jackals pulled up behind them in a black Lincoln Town Car.

The four Jackals slithered out of the Town Car and strolled around the Impala several times. The Cobras grinned at each other looking forward to a good fight. Frank Hudson, the burly leader of the Jackals, began swinging a heavy chain through the air shouting, "This is our turf!" He swung the chain into the front passenger window, sending a shower of glass into Tom Brown's face.

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

Ken Wilson and Billy Joe Johnson pulled their knives and jumped out the other side of the car into the street. They charged the rest of the taunting Jackals gang while Tom picked glass

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out of his eyes.

Frank jumped up, lifted the chain over his head and swung it at Randy, catching him around the left leg. One swift jerk of the chain and Randy was lying on the sidewalk. Frank dragged the chain loose and lifted it up high over his head once again, this time to strike Randy in the face.

Randy, trembling, rolled over, pulled a .45 pistol from his belt and fired twice.

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

~

The remembering left Randy depressed. He wandered back to the table, resumed eating and muttered, "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 before because of his attitude. Now he had made another scene and dreaded the thought of having to endure another lecture on the subject.

Randy passed his hands through his 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 stared at each other in silence. The warden handed a large manila envelope to Randy as he said: "These are your personal effects. You have been pardoned and are free to go."

Randy's head jerked back. He wrinkled his brow as he tried to believe what he heard. Pardoned! He had received a life sentence for killing Frank and expected this prison to be his home forever. He slowly reached out and took the envelope. Memories flooded his racing mind as he looked inside and saw his old wallet, a set of keys to his motorcycle and to his parent's house. He flipped through his address book and saw names of people most of who had forgotten him.

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

"We'll see won't we," Randy shot back, his eyes clouding with resentment as he took his things out of the envelope and laid the envelope on the warden's desk.

"Here are some street clothes. Change in there," the warden pointed to the restroom.

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

The warden gave Randy two hundred dollars and a bus ticket home. Randy opened his wallet, carefully placed the new bills and ticket in it, looked up at the warden and stood in silence.

"Good Luck," the warden offered as he held out his hand. Randy ignored the 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, walked out into the afternoon sun, and boarded a prison bus that would take him to a main bus line in Pine Bluff.

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

Randy, still in disbelief, 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.*

"Why aren't we leaving?" He barked at the driver.

"We're waiting on another guy who's being released today." The driver grinned. "I'd think you would have learned some patience by 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 Whittaker's my name."

"Joe Jameson. I've seen you around."

"You got set free today too?" Randy asked.

"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." Joe answered, pointing back out the window, "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 in the Gospel of John *'This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you.'* That means in the same way."

The air around Randy quivered as a ghostly form persuaded him to react.

Randy clenched his jaw and growled through his teeth. "Look man, don't preach the Bible to me. 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 fall colors blur by as the bus rolled on to the next scene in his life.

The form departed for the moment.

"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 smiled, bowed his head and told the driver "Thanks for the ride."

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

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front of them.

Randy waited for Joe to climb on the bus and get settled, then he got 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 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, 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, and caught a city bus and headed west.

3

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

A large crowd was gathered on the lawn having a picnic celebration. Anti-war demonstrators marched back and forth on the sidewalk shouting at the pastors and 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.

As he reached the steps he recognized the pastor of his parent's church Joel Prindell, a portly man in his mid-fifties. Joel held a microphone as he read a petition that carried 200,000 signatures his group had already gathered 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 the Iranian nuclear plants so they will not be able to make nuclear weapons that they can use against Israel."

The demonstrators jostled peace signs and chanted "NO MORE WAR!
STOP THE WAR!"

Everyone grew silent as the young man took a few steps back and faced the preachers:

"My name is Phillip Ramsey. I am not from either of these groups, but I have something I must say to you." He pointed at Joel and then to the other preachers; "You call yourselves Christians, but you're 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..."

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Joel glared, grabbed the microphone, and tried to resume his speech but the protesters booed: "Let the guy speak! We want to hear what he has to say!" They pressed towards the steps. The police barred their way and made them disperse.

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

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

That guy looked right through me, Randy shivered, his mind swirling with Phillip's words as he boarded another bus towards home.

~

He got off the bus at S. Woodrow Street and walked the few familiar blocks to his parent's house.

~

Randy's mother Peggy heard the doorbell ring. *Who could that be at this time of the afternoon* she wondered as she threw the dishtowel onto the counter. She smoothed a wisp of her 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 and walked in from the garage.

He grabbed Randy and gave him a bear hug, then he got a couple of beers from the refrigerator and handed one to Randy. "Why did they let you out?"

"I don't know. The warden called me into his office at noon today and said I was pardoned. He was surprised too."

"Your room is just like you left it." Peggy pointed up the stairs.

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

"We ate an early supper," Peggy apologized. "But there are some leftovers. I can send out for something else if you like."

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

Mom's baked chicken, mashed potatoes, 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."

Her words jolted Randy back to his conversation with Joe Jameson. He smiled at his mom but somehow he didn't really feel free.

"Our church is having a Fourth of July celebration tonight," Peggy said. "There will be a guest speaker, and snacks," she added. "Would you like to go? Or we can stay home if you would rather."

More preaching, was his first thought. Then he agreed, "Are you kidding? I've been penned up long enough." He laughed at his pun. "I'm ready to get out."

They piled into the car and drove down Booker Street to Prince of Peace Christian Church.

They reached the sanctuary just as Joel Prindell walked up on the stage and greeted the crowd. "Welcome guests, happy Fourth of July to you all. Tonight we celebrate the Declaration of Independence, which paved the way for our God given democratic form of government. Thanks to all of you who helped us at the rally today. Now we will tune in to a live television broadcast from the Kennedy amphitheater in Washington."

The lights dimmed and pastor Prindell sat down.

"Do you remember our pastor?" Peggy asked with admiration.

"Yes, I saw him at the rally at the capitol this afternoon."

The television on the overhead screens showed Jack Harvey, a medium height heavysset man with thick glasses and thinning black hair, organizer of *Christians for the Preservation of Israel*. An enormous Star of David 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. Lowrey, who has graciously consented to be with us tonight. Welcome Mr. President." Jack beamed as he shook J.W.'s hand.

J.W., a handsome Native American from Oklahoma, rose from his chair, walked up, and shook Jack's hand while looking into the camera. "Thank you Dr. Harvey. We are grateful indeed to have such loyal supporters of our *War*

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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 showed video clips from several rallies. "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."

4

After the television program ended, Joel came forward and announced. “We have a special treat for you this evening. Daniel Burton, founder and president of the *Restorers of Christian America* is with us. Daniel is on the front lines fighting to reclaim America so it can once again be the Christian nation it was founded to be.”

Joel gestured to a microphone that was set up in the center aisle in the middle of the congregation. “Feel free to come up at any time and ask questions.” Then Joel extended his towards Daniel, “It’s always good to have you with us.”

The crowd applauded.

“Thank you Joel. It’s always a pleasure to speak here. As your pastor said, tonight we celebrate liberty, the liberty Jesus has called us to. He came to set the captives free.”

Daniel turned on the overheads and brought up picture of a Revolutionary war soldier and the original American flag overlaid with a scripture:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,” Luke 4:18

“We are fulfilling the great commission of Jesus by setting at liberty those who are oppressed and bruised by tyrants.” David proclaimed. “In our day, men like Saddam Hussein, and in our forefather’s day, the evil tyrant, the King of England. Our soldiers are doing the will of God by killing the terrorists who would keep the people in Iraq in bondage. We must continue to pray for their success.”

The crowd rose to its feet and cheered.

Daniel continued “In 1775, one of our Christian Forefathers, Reverend Jacob Duche, in his sermon *The Duties of Standing fast in our Spiritual and Temporal Liberties*, addressed the cause of liberty when he preached this scripture:

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.” Galatians 5:1.

Pointing to the screen, Daniel proclaimed: “This is why America revolted. The King of England was unjust. Duche says God doesn’t expect us to be in

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bondage and ruled by tyrants. We are following the footsteps of our brave Christian founding fathers who fought against their British tyrants.”

The crowd rose to their feet and cheered loudly. Phillip Ramsey, the young man from the rally, had been sitting quietly, listening. He made his way to the microphone.

As soon as the crowd sat down, Phillip said. “You must be careful about who’s footsteps you follow.”

Randy pointed at Phillip and whispered to Peggy. “That guy took the microphone away from Joel Prindell at the rally. But they didn’t show that on the program tonight.”

“What did he say?” Peggy asked, rising in her chair and fixing her eyes on Phillip.

“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 was obviously a troublemaker.” Peggy frowned as she sat back in her seat.

“Probably a Communist!” Greg, sitting beside her, nodded in agreement as he frowned at Phillip.

Phillip continued. “Our so-called Christian forefathers were in rebellion against the Word of God when they revolted against the king. They would not be justified in their revolution regardless of what he had done to them.¹ “We are to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. How dare you say that Jesus meant for us to kill people to obtain the liberty he spoke of? Jesus was talking about our liberty from the bondage of our own sins, not temporal liberty from the abuses of others².”

The Crowd looked at each other and murmured.

Sweat poured down Daniel’s neck as he argued. “Jesus has called us to proclaim Liberty in the Spirit realm with the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God; and he has called us to proclaim liberty in the natural realm with the natural sword and in our age guns, rockets, bombs and bayonets.” He held up a book and waved it to the audience. “If you want to know what the basis of our government was, I suggest you read this book *Two Treatises of Government* by John Locke. There are copies available for purchase in the lobby. Locke talks about Nature’s God, like the founders of our country did in the Declaration of Independence.”

Phillip held up a copy of Locke’s book and cried out. “I’ve read this book. The God John Locke speaks of cannot possibly be the same God as the Lord Jesus Christ?”

“Of course it’s the same God. You don’t know what you are talking about,”

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Daniel stammered wiping his neck with a handkerchief.

Phillip stared at Daniel. Locke says if someone robs you of your coat, you can kill him. Jesus said the opposite. He said not to resist evil, and to give them your shirt too. "The words of Locke contradict the words of Jesus." Phillip exclaimed. "You can't serve two masters. Who will you follow? John Locke or Jesus Christ?"

Daniel swallowed hard.

Phillip put the microphone down, turned and walked to the lobby. He put Locke's book back on the table and went out the front door.

When Randy saw Phillip leave, he ran out to find him.

"Does anyone else have any more questions? Daniel asked, visibly shaken.

Joel came up quickly, thanked Daniel and dismissed the crowd for refreshments.

"I told you that young man was a communist." Greg grumbled to Peggy.

Meanwhile Randy caught up with Phillip. "I'm usually turned off by preachers, but I saw you at the rally this afternoon. I like what you have to say. Do you live around here? I'd like to talk with you sometime."

"There are others who speak the truth." Phillip answered. "If you really want the truth, you will meet those who embrace it." Then he walked on down the street leaving Randy standing, bewildered.

Randy went back in the church and found his parents.

"Why did you run out?" Peggy asked.

"I wanted to catch up with that man who was asking questions."

"You'd be better off staying away from despicable people like him. He would be a bad influence on you. Peggy frowned."

~

When Peggy, Greg and Randy returned home they sat down in the den and turned on the 10:00 news. The interview of the wounded soldier in Baghdad was showing.

Randy said "I saw that clip at noon today. 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. "Of course there is a difference. You killed for petty reasons. You heard Daniel tonight. The soldier was fighting for liberty."

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"How dare you say that our soldiers are wrong in fighting in wars?" Peggy chided? "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 are trying to set oppressed people free. I'm sure they thought that what they were doing was right."

"They probably thought so." Randy answered. "I'm just wondering 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 in the morning."

Randy hugged his dad, 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.

5

Early the next morning, Peggy was singing and cooking in the kitchen. Randy sneaked up behind her and grabbed her. She let out a squeal and swatted him on the behind. They both laughed.

"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, I'm a pretty good electrician."

Tom was excited. "I'm working 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 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. "Do you think it is a good thing going back to your old friends? I don't want you to get in trouble again."

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

Randy went out to the shed and looked at his Harley, amazed at how his dad had kept it so clean. It even had new tires. It started right up. He sat there for a minute relishing the throbbing feeling of having wheels under him again. Then he pulled out and rode to Tom's apartment.

Tom was waiting in the parking lot. "Man it's good to see you. Follow me!" Tom said, as he messed Randy's hair.

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~

Keith Hudson heard a motorcycle, 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 is 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.

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

"What experience do you have Randy?" Keith waited for an answer.

"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."

"This is the warehouse." Keith showed him the building behind the construction office. "You'll find all the supplies you need. Does this interest you?"

"Yes sir! Thanks." Randy replied in a dumfounded fog.

"Do you have any tools?"

"No sir but I'll get some."

"You can use mine until you get some of you own."

They walked down the street looking at a dozen or so houses under various degrees of completion. Randy 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?"

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

"It's only been open for a couple of months," Tom said. "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 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." Alice smiled.

"It's been a strange day. You won't believe who come to see me today... Randy Whittiker."

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

"He got out of prison early 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."

6

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 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 Whittiker, 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."

"See any action?" Randy asked, thinking about the soldier he saw on the news.

"A little." Ken answered reservedly.

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

"What old times?"

"Like the rumbles 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

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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. But I won't forget. The government is still trying to settle it's score, and I'm going to settle mine 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. It's all the same, gang war and government war! 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?"

Randy glowered at the staring 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. "I spent ten years in prison for defending myself. It's hard to forget. Then he lightened up. Why do you hang around with these thugs?" He grinned. "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 happened to Frank."

"Mr. Hudson is a real special guy." June smiled. "A real special guy."

Randy talked some about his time in prison. It was getting late so Tom said, "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 get upset sometimes too. 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."

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"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."

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, Keith 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. They carried their food to a table, then Keith prayed. "Jesus thank you for this food. Thank you for Randy. Bless us all. Amen."

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"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 "Sure, but you don't seem to hate me now. How did you change?"

"After a while, I stopped hating you, but I didn't love you. I loved my family and friends I loved those who loved me. But I knew that even the love I had for them wasn't the kind I love I needed. 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 will not rest until evil and terror is wiped out entirely. That night I picked up a Bible. Something I rarely did. It opened to where Jesus said that we need to 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."

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. 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?"

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"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."

"Yea, 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.

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 he 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.

7

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. He thought. 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. He concluded

"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 in the heavenlies where you are seated with Christ."

Randy was encouraged. The message went to his heart.

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.

Joel went on, "We should thank God that we are not evil men like Saddam Hussein, Yasser Arafat and Osama Bin Laden." Pastor Pruit continued. "We fear God and are moral people, we fast and pray."

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"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 that preacher 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 reaching his hand out he said, "Hi Randy. Glad you're home. Come by and visit me sometime."

"I'll do that." Randy answered. "I do have some questions about your sermon."

The Whittikers 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, he was 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 Phillip confronted him, and confronted Daniel Burton."

"O my Lord! Peggy whispered, interrupting Randy, 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. Keith left a tip on the table, took Alice by the hand and they 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 he said in an embarrassed voice. Hello Mrs. Hudson."

"Hello," Alice mumbled, avoiding Randy's eyes. Randy's heart dropped when he saw her grief. *Somehow I need to talk with her.*

"Would you like to join us?" Peggy asked hoping they would decline.

Alice said quietly, "No thank you, we were finished."

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"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 just enjoying being outside.

He heard a motorcycle crank up next door. He walked around the corner of the house and saw his neighbor astride a Royal Blue hardtail chopper. The rider was five years older than Randy, had hair down past his shoulders with a beard to match the length, and was wearing old camouflage coveralls,

Randy walked over to admire the bike.

"Hi Randy." The rider said. "I'm Charlie Hathaway do you remember me."

"Yea, but I would have recognized you." Randy laughed as he shook his 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?"

"A year after you went to prison, I was in combat zones. I was 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."

"Are you going somewhere now? Randy asked. "Want company?"

"Sure, get your 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 by the lake, 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 soldier's killing OK but mine wasn't?"

"I know Charlie frowned. I thought about you when I was over there, and

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about that same question. And most all of the soldiers that I have known had that same 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. That's the way it is with most of the soldiers. 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 were doing, but they really didn't want to kill anyone. When they did, they were traumatized except for those who were on a great power trip. But as for me, I just tried to comfort them, trying to keep them all 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?" the soldiers I mean.

"Just like everyone, hoping that God is watching over them. I remember one soldier in particular. He had joined the Army because his father thought he was a coward. The soldier 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 groaned, caught his breath and continued.

"Being over there had 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 we do, not just combat.. but that can't be being led by his Spirit. I don't know what God thinks any more. Can't say that he cares any more about us than 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."

"I heard a guy at the rally Wednesday. He was saying the same thing as you."

"Phillip," Charlie laughed, "He is a voice crying in the wilderness. I saw Joel Prindell at the rally. He was my pastor before I left for Iraq. He encouraged me to become a Chaplain. When I got back he wouldn't listen to the questions I had. His agenda doesn't have place for the things Jesus said."

"What are you doing now that you are back?"

"I work at a Jake's Cycle Shop, that's where I built my bike."

"Nice," Randy smiled.

It was dark when they got back home.

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The next day, Randy finished his job and 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. 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.

8

Later in the afternoon, at the bookstore, 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?"

I have this letter from my parents. Would you like to read it?

"Sure." She reached for the letter

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 and read:

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

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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 your 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."

"Yes, they do." June wiped her eyes. "I've thought about that before."

She saw a customer so she told Assad "I have to go. I'm meeting someone at the Golden Goose tonight at 7:00. He doesn't know many people around here. I think you'd like to talk to him. Would you like to come?"

"That might prove interesting. Yes, I'll come."

"Fine." June said. "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 in 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 Whittiker. Randy this is Assad Ahmed." June introduced as the two men shook hands and 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?" Randy asked.

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

"I can understand killing." Randy replied, "Last week I was released from prison for killing a man in a street fight. We were a high school gang called the *Cobras*, We were defending what we considered 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.

"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. He 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. "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."

Assad's words 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 had forgiven him, how he still hated Mike, and his conversation with Charlie. Tears were running down Randy's 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.

June watched him with joy.

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They talked about work for a while, paid their bill and walked out to the front porch. Assad waved goodbye as he walked to his car.

"Thanks June," Randy said. "I'm glad I met you."

June smiled. "I'm glad I met you too."

Randy paused in the parking lot and thought about Alice. A deep sadness moved in his heart. *It's 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 broke. She 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."

9

The next evening, Randy stood in the open door of Joel Prindell's office. "Got a minute?"

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

Randy turned a chair around and straddled it, facing Joel. "Well, there's a lot of stuff rolling around in my mind. Things that don't fit together."

"Like what?"

"Did you see the 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.

"Yes. I am serious. I want to know."

"Your gang didn't own the land you were fighting to protect." The land belongs to America. The rulers of America have authority from the people. You had no authority to defend and kill over land that did not belong to you. That's why you went to prison."

"Authority?" Randy answered. "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 gave ourselves authority. We didn't do anything different than the patriots of the American Revolution. We were just on a smaller scale."

"Are you trying to justify what you did?"

"Maybe, but isn't that what most everyone is doing? Justifying killing in Iraq? Why is killing is justified in one case and not in the other?"

Joel didn't know what to say. Randy continued.

There's something else that doesn't fit. I saw you at the rally last Wednesday. You were saying that we should bomb Iran."

"Yes I did," Joel answered quietly, "They are a threat to Israel and America."

"Then why on Sunday morning did you say we don't war against people, that we do not war against flesh and blood."

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

"Doesn't that blow your mind believing such opposite things?"

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

"You mean a Christian stops being an individual 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 Assad Ahmad, a man from Jordan who asked me why Christians kill. His brother, a suicide bomber blew himself up in a bus. His parents are upset. 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."

"The great *American Dream*, right? I suppose I'm having second thoughts about this dream, and about all of the killing it seems to take to keep that dream alive. Is this so-called life that we are trying to save really worth killing for? There must be more to being a Christian. And I think that Charlie Hathaway thinks so too."

"Charlie is a dropout." Joel scorned. Threw away a bright future in the ministry."

Well, I have to go, Pastor. If you figure it out, you can let me know."

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

"What's that?" Joel replied nervously, 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 replied 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 cleaning 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 Paul said we were not to judge people. You may want to read that. Seems like there is a lot of unwanted Bible verses that don't get preached from pulpits. "See you around

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pastor.”

Joel Prindell was stunned ... speechless.

10

The next afternoon Randy and Keith were at *The Home Warehouse* maneuvering hand trucks loaded with a stove and a dishwasher through the checkout line. Randy spotted Joel Prindell in the next line.

"Hi Pastor Prindell what are you doing here?"

Joel held up a new desk lamp as he walked over to them. "My old one burned out last night."

"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 he thought, *Peace... that isn't what I've been preaching.*

"Can I buy you a cup of coffee?" Keith offered shaking his hand. "There's one 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.

"It's been a strange week." Joel said, sipping his coffee. "Some crackpot interrupted my speech at the rally at the Capitol and he embarrassed our speaker at church that same evening. Then last night, Randy came to my office and asked me some most unusual questions."

"Randy's certainly isn't shy." Keith slapped Randy on the back. Then turning to Joel he asked, "What did the crackpot say?"

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

"Have you?" Keith asked?

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

"I'm Frank Hudson's father."

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

"Yes Joel, Randy killed my son," Keith said. "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 make us feel bad. 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 and came to realize that Randy wasn't the enemy. I was battling unseen enemies that I needed to defeat with spiritual weapons."

Joel smiled, "Yes, I preached about that Sunday." Then he blushed again, remembering his discussion with Randy the night before."

Keith stood up. "We'd better go, we have a lot to do today."

"Thanks for the coffee." Joel gestured with his cup up 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 and went through the motions at the Wednesday night service.

~

After the service was over, he went home and sat in bed talking with his wife Karen. He laid down 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 with a crowd of people down a wide road in thick darkness. Strikes of lightning illuminated scenes in the smoky mist that surrounded him. He laughed because they were scenes from his life and it 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 tell.

As Joel grew closer to the throne, a cold fear gripped him. The man on the throne was Joel himself. He tried to run back but was blocked by a large angel.

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The man on the throne followed Joel's every move and 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."

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. But I've been born again. I'm a child of God. I said the sinner's prayer." 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 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 picked it up. *Yes, What Would Jesus Do?*

He put his head down on the desk and cried, thinking about the last week and the people who had tried to show him the truth, Charlie, Phillip, Randy and finally Keith. He thanked God for giving him another chance. Then he turned on his computer and prepared his sermon for the coming Sunday.

11

The following Sunday 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 stranger who was trying to wake me up. He said that I didn't know the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament. I thought he

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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 mislead 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.

"How unpatriotic of you!" a voice from the congregation rang 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: "You are out of line, Pastor. America has a Godly government founded on Christian principles."

"No," Joel continued, "We are no different from the warring Muslims that we have hated and criticized. "

"Arab Lover!" a voice rang out. Then another, until there were shouts all over the building and people began to leave.

Joel continued, "A true Christian Worldview would view the world as Christ views it. But the worldview we have been seeing through has a Christ who looks like this:"

He turned the overhead on and showed a classic picture of Jesus with upraised hands surrounded by his worshiping disciples. He 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.

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, to love our enemies."

"But God is using the war to make it easier for Christians to spread the Gospel in Iraq." Sam Winston, one of the elders, objected.

"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:"

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

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"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 are corrupt. They are making ungodly laws. They hate us. They need to be replaced before we can be effective. Get some of our people in office so we can clean up that organization. Then go out and 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 is acting just as if Jesus had spoken those words."

Joel pointed into the camera and said "Dr. Jack Harvey, this is the Jesus you are serving. Are your dreams of impersonal attacks on impersonal nuclear plants in Iran just blowing up some unpopulated buildings in the desert? No. You are preaching murder, not love."

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

"Do you think you are holier than we are because you have had this revelation of the evils of war?" Another person voiced.

"No, I'm just exposing a great hidden sin of the church, 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 think we are holy and righteous."

Betty Burns, the TV news director yelled, "Cut! Cut!" She jumped in front of a camera. "We apologize that we are having technical difficulties. We will return to Joel Prindell's service as soon as the problem has been solved." The television station was in panic. "My God! He's gone too far this time. The

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entire program has gone out over the air. We should have caught it but Joel Prindell never has given us any problem before.”

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 as she ran out of the church.

~

Later that night an explosion rocked Randy's quiet neighborhood. Randy looked out his window and saw fire lighting the sky. *Prince of Peace Church* Randy thought as ran down the stairs past his parents and many neighbors who were already out on the street wondering what had happened.

The wall of Pastor Joel's office was blown out. Randy made his way inside the burning building to see if anyone was inside. He found Joel Prindell trapped under a large wooden beam. Randy yelled for help. Several men lifted the beam and Randy pulled Joel free.

“Pastor Prindell” Randy frowned. “I won't rest until I take out the terrorists who did this to you.”

“Let it go Randy. It doesn't matter.” Joel mumbled as blood poured from his mouth. “I have the answer to your question. There is no difference. Killing is killing.” He grabbed Randy's arm and pulled him close. “It must stop now for you. 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 looked at Keith “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.*”

“Thanks for the coffee,” Randy finally said, “and for caring.”

Keith put his hand on Randy's shoulder. “Take it easy today.”

Randy busied himself with some simple jobs for the rest of the day that seemed so long.

12

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.

"Who did the bombing?" Randy asked.

"Stay out if it. You don't want to end up back in prison." Tom warned.

"Stay out of it? They are terrorists and must be stopped!" Randy shouted."

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*."

"Who are they?" Randy demanded.

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

Randy stormed out the door. Jumped on his motorcycle and roared off. June ran after him screaming. "Randy, Don't!"

Mom's got a gun, Randy remembered as he raced home. Randy went in house. A note on the table said, "We've gone shopping."

Good, they're not here. He went into their bedroom, found the .38 special snub nosed revolver in the nightstand, checked to make sure it was loaded, and stuck it in his pocket.

~

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.

"Must be the place," he mumbled, rage boiling in him again as he silently opened a door and walked 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

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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 whimpered sarcastically as his pushed his chair back. "I liked that dog."

"Stay Put." Randy ordered turning his gun back on the men. He started to 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 lowering 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. 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 grabbed him by the feet, dragged him through the front door and threw him in out into the street.

~

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 O.K. 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 come see him.

In the room, June found Randy's parent's phone number in his wallet and

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called them. She pulled up a chair close to Randy's bed. "Hey sleepyhead?"

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 fifteen minutes later, 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 yelled "Oh that hurt," grabbing his ribs.

"You all need to leave now and give him some rest." The nurse said, escorting 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."

"Sure 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."

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

~

Peggy 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 me to let it go and forgive them."

"What stopped you?"

"I looked at those men, and thought 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."

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

13

"I made arrangements with the funeral home," Neal told the other elders who had gathered together at the church early Tuesday morning. "Until last Sunday, I would have known what to say about Joel Prindell. But after his sermon last Sunday... I don't know even know the man."

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

"Done!" Neal said. "I'll say a prayer and then the people can speak."

~

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. We broadcast all of Prindell's 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, Stan and the other elders sat on the front row on the other side of the aisle.

Greg, Peggy and Randy had just gotten out of the car when they saw June and Assad. They all walked in together, signed the guest register and sat together in the back.

Randy saw Keith and Alice sitting towards the front. As the final few people were seated, an organist began playing hymns. Neal 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 Kinsey who had walked up to the lectern.

"This afternoon 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

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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. Stan fidgeted and people stirred nervously. 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.

Keith came forward. "My name is Keith Hudson. I saw Keith's sermon on television last Sunday. I'd like to say what I believe he would say if he was speaking to you today. I think he would I think he would ask: "Do you understand what the prayer you just recited from memory means?"

The crowd grew uneasy.

Keith continued, "Open your Bibles to Matthew Chapter six and read the next two verses that follow that prayer:"

"For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

"I think Joel would emphasize that those two verses are the conditions for your sins to be forgiven. God is willing to pardon us only if we are willing to pardon those who have offended us. We must go beyond receiving pardon from God for the things we have done to him and to others. We must extend pardon to others to those who have offended us. We will do that because we have the Love of God in our hearts. If we will not do that it's because we do not have God's love. Thinking that we can receive pardon from God and not pardon others is foolishness- wishful thinking."

Keith walked back to his seat in the silent crowd

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

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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. He showed me what a real Christians is. I want to be like him. 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. I only knew him for a week, but I probably know him better than any of you. So I'll give the message today. If you don't like it, you can leave like you did last Sunday.”

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

“I want to set something straight,” Randy said walking up to Neal. “Joel 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, “I'm Randy Whittiker, the son of Greg and Peggy Whittiker. 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, “for killing their son Frank.”

The crowd gasped.

“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. “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 all, but Jesus spoke to my heart and said *I forgave you when you were my enemy*. 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 in the back of the room. He had tears in his eyes and smiled as Randy as he sat down.

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

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

After the service was over. Neal ran up to 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."

" Peace Hippie nonsense!" That is not from God." Neal scoffed and walked off.

Randy was getting into his parent's car when Alice Hudson walked 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. I'm getting free of it finally. You asked me to forgive you. I do with all my heart. I'd like to be your friend. We all need each other, I'm finding out."

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

He walked towards her. They hugged each other. It hurt his ribs, but it felt so good.

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In Washington that afternoon, Secretary of Defense Norm Randolph handed J.W. a DVD. "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 (CFPI)*. 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 CFPI and preached an anti war sermon that was nationally televised. The next evening, his church was bombed and he was killed. His funeral had some interesting speeches. There's some Moslem guy involved too."

Curious, J.W. asked "Anything else?"

"Yes sir, there is a certain Phillip Ramsey, background check turned up nothing, just another raving prophet. No record of trouble but he was at Joel Prindell's rally and also was at a church service when you made your appearance with Jack Harvey. He agitated Prindell and also confronted Daniel Burton, a right-winger we've been watching. It's all on the DVD."

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

"My God!" he exclaimed after he finished viewing the DVD. He walked over to the window and gazed out in shock. 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 Prindell had Christianity, what do I have?*

J.W. laid awake most of the night thinking about the DVD.

~

He discussed it with his wife Cindy over breakfast. Then he went into his study, picked up his Bible and looked at the verse Phillip quoted:

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:

But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy

right cheek, turn to him the other also..." Matt 5:38-45

The words seemed to jump from the page. Tears came to his eyes when he saw how hard 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.*

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The truth dawned on JW as he thought *this is why our American Government was not founded on Christianity. Because if 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.

~

He had no sooner finished his prayer when a blinding light stabbed through the windows, followed immediately by a shock wave that collapsed the White House library, knocking him to the ground under a cascade of books and rubble.

He lay on his back 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* where his wife Cindy, the Vice President Gene Gaston and Gene's wife Maureen were waiting. After he was on board the helicopter, they headed for *Air Force One*.

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

Once aboard *Air Force One*, they hurriedly had J.W. shower 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 to 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 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.

J.W.'s 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

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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. I have something to say to whoever did this: 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. Go and sin no more."

J.W. paused again and concluded..."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!"

15

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 a crackpot!"

"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. 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

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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 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, "Sam 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."

In Palestine Amira and Hazem Ahmad sat in their kitchen watching the news with their son Assad. He had just arrived, having flown home after Joel's funeral 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 my friend Randy after he had killed his son. Keith loved him and cared for him like a son. And there was another, 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. 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." Assad told his father as they continued their meal.

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~

Churches across America held prayer vigils for those who were injured in the bombing. A few took the bombing and what J.W. said as a wake up call and repented.

~

That afternoon, Barry Winsworth, the Republican Congressman from Texas, was talking to his wife and children assuring them that he was all right in the shelter 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 Jack, 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."

16

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. Lowrey 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.

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.

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Walt declared the proceedings done and e-mailed the Articles to Chief Justice Gordon Byron, who called the senate to meet at 6:00 PM that evening and delivered the *Article of Impeachment* and a summons to President Lowery.

~

At 6:00 PM sharp, Chief Justice Byron gaveled the court to session and read the charges. Then he addressed J.W. "Mr. President, you were out of line when you 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. 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 all who will hear, to friends and enemies alike. They pray for both those in authority and for their enemies."

"Cheap talk!" Justice Byron returned. "We can't love their enemies and overlook their attacks that's unnatural."

"Love has to come from Jesus living in our hearts." J.W. pleaded. "We cannot make ourselves love. If we have the Spirit of God in our hearts, we will love, because we will have a new nature, the nature of Jesus in us. In the New Testament, God does not hold our offences against us. True Christians will not hold offences of their enemies against them either. "

Growing more and more impatient, Justice Byron slammed the gavel down. "Stop your raving. What about justice? You were sworn to uphold justice. If we do not judge others. Who will administer justice? We would have anarchy and chaos."

J.W replied "God sets up governments and their rulers in the kingdoms of the

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world for his purposes and he administers justice through them. I am no longer in the kingdom of the world. I will leave administration of justice for those who are not interested in the Kingdom of God. As a born again child of God, I am not called to judge. I could no longer declare war or judge and condemn people. I must leave that to God. 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 cannot continue as President and Commander and Chief, because I can no longer uphold the constitution and ask congress to declare war.”

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

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

17

"Traitor, Coward!" multitudes of voices jeered as J.W. walked out of the room and out into the hallway.

His wife Cindy was waiting for him in the hallway. "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.

The mood in the courtroom 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. Lowrey 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. Five thousand people were killed, ten thousand had radiation sickness and twenty thousand had lesser injuries.

Most people were furious at J.W., and didn't want to remember him. A nervous state of normality returned to the nation, and most of the church went back to sleep.

18

Back in Little Rock, on Saturday morning, Randy told Peggy as he walked out the door "Mom I'm getting away for the day, don't wait up for me. "

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.

"I'm Randy Whittiker." he said over the intercom. "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 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 your 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.

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.*

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~

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.

"OK Randy, come back into my office." Mike offered hoping to avoid a scene.

"A table will be fine," Randy said meekly.

They sat in a corner and Randy began, "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."

"I'm sorry, Mike. Your testifying against me was one of the best things that ever happened to me. I can see it now."

"Randy, I heard what you said at the funeral. Now that I see you, I believe you meant what you said. I want what you have too." 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, then 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 fight flooded him once again.

"Randy! A voice 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.

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~

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:

"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; 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 that to change, dad."

"I wanted 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."

"The movement died. It was a fantasy. The drugs 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."

"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. I have no illusions that I am in control of anything."

"Maybe you can do what I never could." Greg started the truck. "There...that

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sounds better."

The radio was playing a different song now.

~

Randy headed 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 him in the music department. They went to the bookstore café and got some coffee.

Then they went out 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.

~

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. *Could Prindell have been right? Could those two young men at the funeral be right? Could J.W. and his preposterous Declaration of Dependence have been 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 the same time, 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.

AFTERWORD

A Line in the Sand

Where is your limit of forgiveness? How do you determine how much abuse or offence you will endure without retaliation? I hope that the story I have presented to you will bring you to ask that question.

The answer to this question is costly. It may cost you all of your traditional values, customs and comforts. It may cost you all you have. But you must count the cost.

Forgiveness does cost, and we weigh the extent of our forgiveness on the cost we are willing to pay to endure the offence. If it cost us only perhaps our hurt feelings, we may be quick to forgive. If it costs us a little money, we may be more hesitant to forgive. If it costs us a lot of money, we may forgive conditionally based on the offender making restitution. If it costs us much more, maybe all we have including our possessions, our standard of living or even the lives of our loved ones as in the case of murder or war, we will probably have reached the point where we will put forgiveness aside and retaliate. What will we use as a measure to decide the point where we will no longer forgive. Is there a point that we can rest upon?

What is the answer to the question? Does Jesus give us an answer?

Jesus says that we must forsake all and count the cost of being his disciples.

Forgiveness costs. .It will cost us all that we have even our own life.

Jesus said that he who is forgiven much loves much. This love is a gift that God gives to us based on the room we are willing to prepare for Him in our hearts, and then, His love in us will move us to love as He loves and forgive as He forgives, because as his children we will be moved by His Holy Spirit.

Imagine you are standing on a beach facing an enemy. You take your sword and draw a line in the sand. A line that is your limit of forgiveness of someone who has offended you or will offend you. How far will you go to forgive someone who has offended you? Study your line. You will not forgive beyond where it is drawn. If your enemy transgresses past that line, you will not forgive. You will use your sword of justice against him if he steps over the line. How do you determine where that line is drawn?

Take the Sword of the Spirit and draw a line in the sand. And let the ocean of the Love of God wash it away.

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Is there a standard for how far we are to go to forgive? Where should the line be? Should there be a line?

Maybe we draw the line at the point beyond which, we are not willing to endure the cost of the offences

Most will agree that we all need to forgive those who trespass against us. But we seem to disagree as to how far we should go.

This story is about some people who crossed over the line.

We all seem to have taken our sword and drawn a line in the sand. We will forgive up to that point, but beyond that. We will use the sword on the offender.

Where do we draw the line beyond which we will not forgive someone who has done something bad to us?

Where does Jesus draw that line? Does he draw a line at all. I think not.

What does the offence cost us? What is the cost of forgiveness? We weigh what we will forgive based on the cost of the offence. (see June's book- how to forgive when we don't feel like it.) If it doesn't cost us anything but perhaps our hurt feelings, we will forgive, if it costs us some money, we will be more hesitant. If it costs us a lot of money, we will forgive conditionally based on the offender making restitution. If in the case of murder or war it costs us all we have including our possessions, our standard of living or our loved ones, we will retaliate.

Jesus said that unless we forsake all we have, we cannot be his disciples. That is the ultimate cost of forgiveness-all. Unless we hate mother and father and family and possessions and own life we cannot be his disciples. Jesus lays this out as the cost of discipleship- the cost of forgiveness is no less than this.

draw a line in the sand

to say that a particular idea or activity will not be supported or accepted. *The president has drawn a line in the sand, which means that if the foreign troops are not removed, they will be attacked.*

cross the line

if someone crosses the line they start behaving in a way that is not socially acceptable. *Players had crossed the line by attacking fans on the pitch.*

See also: [cross](#), [line](#)

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cross the line

1. to change from being acceptable to being unacceptable. *I thought the jokes crossed the line and were basically embarrassing.*

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2. to do something wrong. *If you steal someone's idea, you have absolutely crossed the line.*

draw the line

to think of or treat one thing as different from another. *It all depends on your concept of fiction and where you draw the line between fact and fiction. (often + between) So at what point do we consider the foetus a baby? We've got to draw the line somewhere.* Where does Jesus draw the line of forgiveness?

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