



THE POWER OF PRAYER IN REAL LIFE

*“And it shall come to pass, that before they call,
I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.” Isaiah 65:24*

A Special Report Prepared By The Washington Times Advocacy Department

Remembering a desperate promise made in war, kept in peace



By Luke Zamperini

It was July 1943, somewhere in the middle of the equatorial Pacific.

Louis Zamperini and two other men had been drifting in a rubber life raft that they had called home for some three and a half weeks.

They had survived the plane crash that claimed the lives of eight of their comrades and were now drifting helplessly toward enemy territory with no food or water. This, it would turn out, was only the midway point in their odyssey.

The meager provisions they had found in the raft had run out within the first week. The men had so far survived by eating what birds, fish and sharks they could catch with their bare hands and drinking what water they could collect from the occasional squall that passed over them. Before this voyage was through, one man would die and the other two would lose almost 60 percent of their body mass.

Scientists tell us that you can live three to five days without water. Even less if exposed to direct sunlight. It had been a week since Louis and his companions had had a sip. They were dying and they knew it.

Louis had never been a religious man. His family was at best nominally Catholic.

But this day he was desperate. He had no where else to turn so he began to pray, "Lord, if you get me through this, if you bring me home alive, I will seek you and serve you the rest of my life."

Within the hour, a squall appeared. The men desperately paddled into the rain with upturned faces drinking in the heavenly water and collecting what they could in their empty water tins. They had been saved. Several more times they would be without water. Each time they prayed, the rains would come.

But this day he was desperate. He had no where else to turn so he began to pray, "Lord, if you get me through this, if you bring me home alive, I will seek you and serve you the rest of my life."

After 47 days at sea, they were rescued by the Japanese Navy and interred for 27 months. Having been a famous athlete, Louis was singled out for propaganda purposes and beaten mercilessly in the hopes that he could be broken and be willing to make broadcasts for Radio Tokyo.

He could not be broken, but he was damaged. He developed what we know today to be Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and brought this home with him at the war's end.

Louis' physical deprivation at the hands of his captors and in the open sea had ended his athletic career. He unsuccessfully tried many business ventures only to end up broke and angry. Angry with the Japanese for what they did to him, angry with his failures, and angry

with his PTSD.

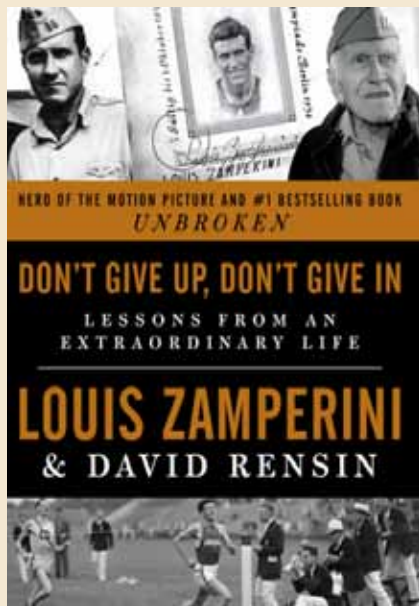
The man that could not be broken by his captors had finally been broken by hatred and alcohol abuse. Once more he found himself with no where else to turn.

At the urging of his wife, Louis attended a tent meeting in Los Angeles by a new evangelist by the name of Billy Graham. During the sermon, Louis was brought back to that moment on the raft when he prayed for rain and realized that although God brought him home alive, Louis had reneged on his promise to seek and serve the Lord.

Feeling ashamed, he went forward and dedicated his life to Christ. Immediately he knew he was done fighting, drinking and hating. His PTSD miraculously disappeared. Soon after, he returned to Japan on a mission and forgave his former captors face to face.

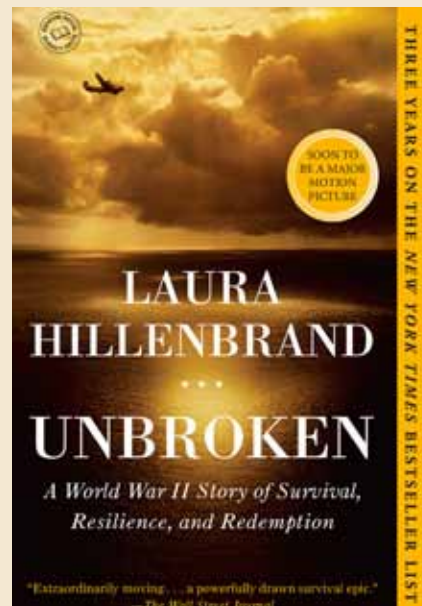
He dedicated the rest of his life in service to others, testifying of his experience and conversion, and establishing a youth camp, which is still in service today under The Louis Zamperini Foundation and its partners.

Luke Zamperini is the son of the late Louis Zamperini and chairman of the Louis Zamperini Foundation.



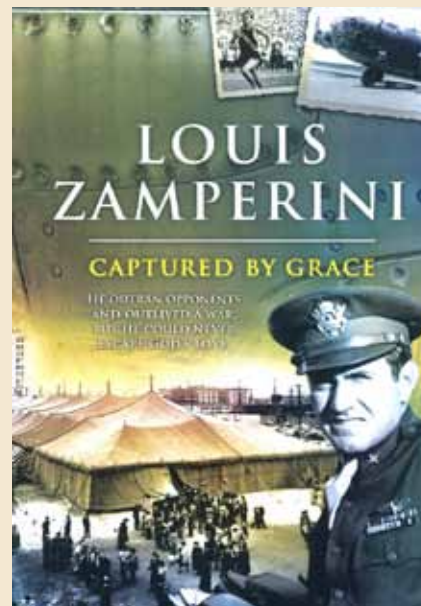
"Don't Give Up, Don't Give In: Lessons from an Extraordinary Life"

By Louis Zamperini and David Rensin
HarperCollins, 2014



"Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption"

By Laura Hillenbrand
Random House, 2010



"Louis Zamperini: Captured by Grace" (2014)

Documentary (28 minutes) by Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. Available at billygraham.org/videos.

"Devil at My Heels: A Heroic Olympian's Astonishing Story of Survival as a Japanese POW in World War II"

By Louis Zamperini and David Rensin
William Morrow, 2003

"Unbroken (The Young Adult Adaptation): An Olympian's Journey from Airman to Castaway to Captive"

By Laura Hillenbrand
Random House Children's Books, 2014

"Unbroken" (2014)

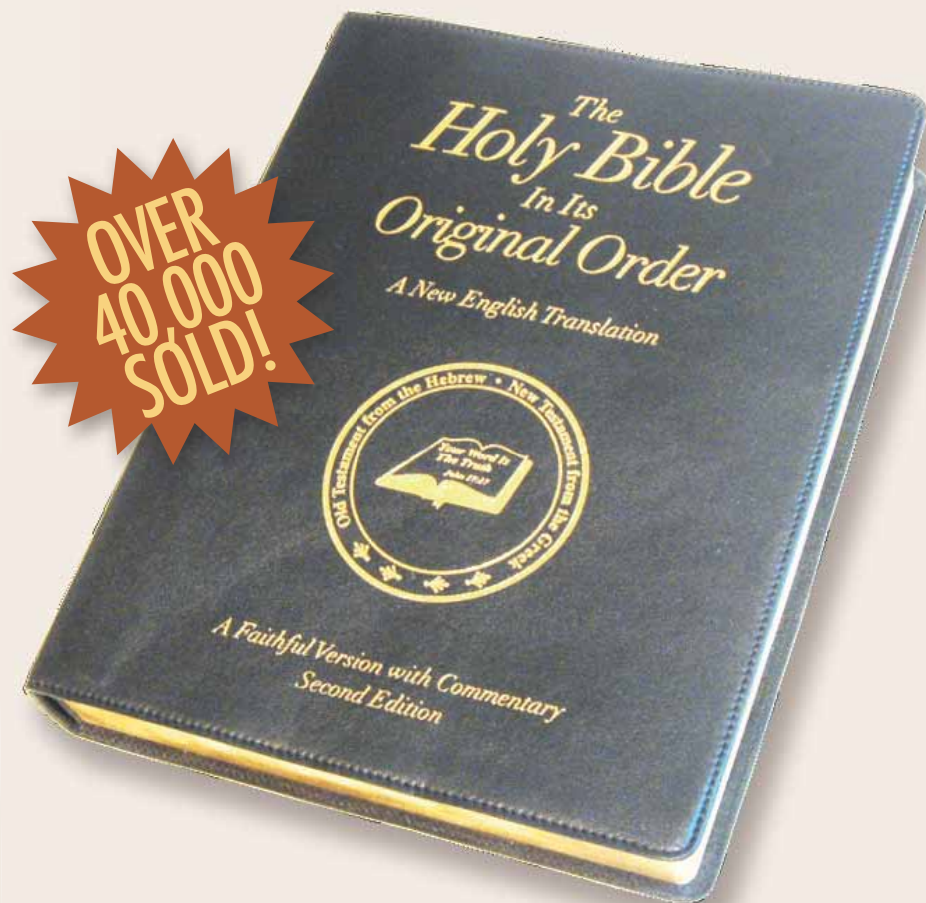
Full-length, directed by Angelina Jolie; produced by Legendary Pictures, Jolie Pas, 3 Arts Entertainment; and distributed by Universal Pictures.

"Unbroken: Legacy of Faith Edition" (2015)

Includes full-length feature film, "Unbroken," and "Legacy of Faith," a 90-minute bonus disc with interviews and documentary footage of Louie Zamperini, Rev. Billy Graham and Pastor Greg Laurie, among others. Available through Pure Flix Entertainment, online outlets and Christian bookstores.

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By Chuck Bentley

At age 41, my spiritual life had become tepid, joyless and somewhat irrelevant to me.

The Christian faith had been a very real part of my life since I was a child, but as I grew older, although my faith was intact, the cares of the world had slowly eroded any real reliance upon God. I was going through the religious motions marked by attending church and minimal charitable giving, but the vibrancy of a personal relationship was suffering.

My wife, Ann, an avid Bible reader, challenged me to read the Bible, something I had not regularly done as an adult. In 2000, beginning in the New Testament, I started reading. It did not take long to be confronted with challenges

that would change my life forever.

On Day Two, I saw in the sixth chapter of Matthew the clear instructions of Jesus to give in secret, pray in secret and to fast in secret. None of those practices were a part of my life at that time. But I was looking for something to reignite my relationship with the One I called Lord.

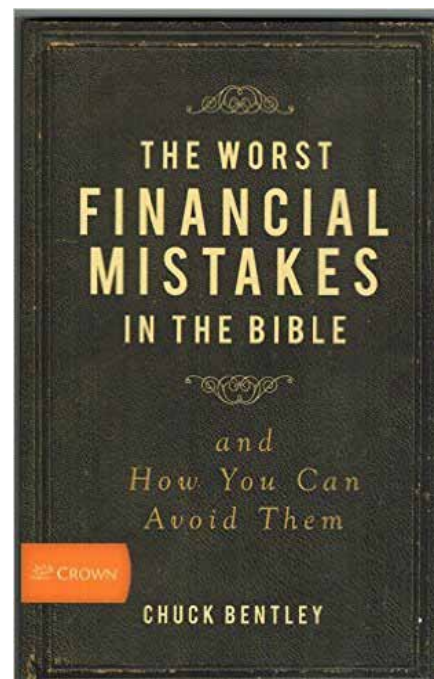
What captured my attention was the obvious promise that follows each of those calls to action: "Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." "Really?" I thought to myself.

In His own words, Jesus was challenging me not to be "religious" through public displays, but to put faith into practice privately. So I did. All three of these, beginning with prayer.

Following these literal instructions in Matthew 6:6 — "But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen" — I made it a daily practice to get up an hour earlier in the mornings, set aside time to read my Bible, and then go into a small closet in our home, close the door, get on my knees and pray.

My understanding from this verse was that God wanted me to avoid vain posturing and to pray privately, secretly because of my need for humility. Certainly, that was a need of mine. But there was something far greater to learn.

The joy of secret prayer



In this new way of praying, although reverent and respectful, I noticed that I prayed differently when no one else was listening. Prayers became sincere, authentic and transparent. The words that I verbalized aloud were not catchphrases or platitudes, but real, conversational and often urgent.

What was happening was that I was learning to actually talk to God.

These were not crafted prayers to impress others. These moments began to bring me closer to Him and into a two-way relationship in a similar way as human friendships develop through conversation.

But what about that "openly reward you" part, you may be asking?

Over time, I began to notice answers to very specific prayers about things that nobody knew were on my heart but God. In other words, Jesus began to show me that He was there; He was listening to those prayers! An incredible joy flooded my soul.

God wanted me to learn that He was in fact present. That He is the God who is not a historic figure or distant, disinterested deity, but the God who is there, fully alive and fully engaged. Only by praying in secret could I have discovered for certain that the King of Kings was listening. What could be better?

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Chuck Bentley is CEO of Crown Financial Ministries. He is also the author of "The Worst Financial Mistakes in the Bible And How You Can Avoid Them"; host of the nationally syndicated radio feature, My MoneyLife™; and a columnist at the Christian Post. Follow him @chuckbentley.

Seeking God's guidance at a career crossroads



By Jim Daly

The value of a compass is its ability to discern true north. No matter how thick the trees or the fog surrounding you, true north gives a sense of clarity and a direction to move.

Outside of the principles taught in Scripture, that sense of true north through my life has always come from prayer.

Back in 1989, I had a decision to make. I had no idea at the time that my entire future hinged on that one moment. I'd

been working in northern California in the sales division for International Paper, one of the industry leaders in the field of paper and packaging products.

One night, the plant manager took me to dinner at a swanky restaurant in Berkeley, where he offered me an upper-management position with a six-figure salary. I enjoyed working at International Paper and was excited about the opportunity. I was also pleased that it would give me the financial means to take care of my wife, Jean, and the children we hoped to raise. We could even buy our first house.

That night, I told Jean about the position and the salary I'd been offered. We both were enthusiastic about this new direction for us.

A few minutes later, Jean said, "By the way, there's some kind of business message on the answering machine for you."

The recording was from a man named Ron Wilson. Ten months earlier, Ron had talked to me about a new position I might be interested in at a nonprofit organization called Focus on the Family. Jean and I admired Focus' mission to strengthen marriages and

families and were big fans of their radio broadcasts, so we were intrigued by the opportunity. But the months had passed, and I hadn't heard back from Ron.

Because I didn't want to force my way through a door the Lord wasn't opening, I let it go.

But now, Ron's message said the position had finally been approved. Would I still be interested?

Suddenly, I had two opportunities to consider, so I prayed about both. I knew Focus wouldn't be able to offer the same compensation as International Paper, but money wasn't the only consideration. The Focus mission was close to my heart. My mom died when I was nine, and my stepdad walked out on my siblings and me the day of her funeral. I spent a year in foster care, and my dad later died an alcoholic. The chance to help families around the United States and the world in a significant and meaningful way was an enticing possibility.

I called Ron and flew to Los Angeles the next day for a series of intense interviews and meetings with Focus executives. Throughout the day and on the flight home, Jean and I continued to talk

and pray. Ron called on Saturday to ask me to join the Focus on the Family team — at one-third the salary I would make at International Paper. Still, I knew what I felt the Lord was telling me. Ten minutes later, I called Ron and accepted the offer. I've never regretted the decision.

I had no idea then that 16 years later God would lead me to assume the presidency of Focus on the Family.

In some ways, the power of prayer is a mystery. Not every prayer receives what we might consider a definitive answer, of course. But I'm convinced, both from the truth of Scripture and from many experiences throughout my life, that the Lord hears our hearts and moves according to His plans to guide our steps.

That's true north.

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Jim Daly is president of Focus on the Family. He co-hosts its daily radio broadcast, which is carried on some 2,000 radio outlets and has been inducted into the National Radio Hall of Fame. Mr. Daly's forthcoming book, "Marriage Done Right: One Man, One Woman," (Regnery Faith) will release in June.

By Cheryl Wetzstein

The stories could happen to anyone: A new adoptive father is repeatedly rebuffed by his little girl, even though she immediately embraces her new mom.

A mother wrestles with anger and despair when her “perfect” baby is found to have a serious, permanent illness. A prison chaplain is startled when he comes face to face with the man — now an inmate in his care — who shot him point-blank eight years earlier.

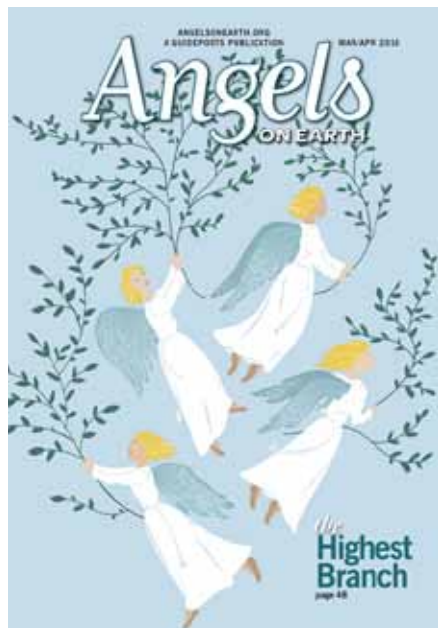
A divorced father heading to work sees an elderly couple sitting in a stalled car on some train tracks — and then hears the chilling whistle of the approaching locomotive.

For more than 70 years, the far-reaching ministry known as Guideposts has been capturing these kinds of stories of faith and prayer in real life, and shared them with untold millions of readers.

“Human beings can connect through stories,” said Rev. Dr. Pablo R. Diaz, Guideposts’ vice president of ministries and outreach, who travels frequently to military bases and Veterans Administration hospitals to share inspirational materials.

“We endeavor to meet people at those junctures in life when they really need us,” said Edward Grinnan, editor-in-chief and vice president of Guideposts Publications. “That’s why we’re in doctor’s offices and hospitals and rehabs, and even prisons.”

Guideposts magazine: 70 years of ‘power of prayer’ in real life



Founded in 1945 by “The Power of Positive Thinking” author Dr. Norman Vincent Peale and his wife, Ruth Stafford Peale, the Guideposts ministry has grown to five magazines, two annual devotionals, an online store with Christian



fiction and hundreds of other titles, specialized booklets, ebooks, newsletters, a very active Web site, and a prayer ministry that receives 5 million prayer requests a year — which are then prayed for by thousands of volunteers.

“We certainly apply all the best business practices, but ultimately our success comes from another source,” John F. Temple, Guideposts’ longtime president and CEO, wrote to readers in March.

“Our goal is to make an impact for good in this world, to deliver hope to millions and millions of people,” and it is done “with your help,” Mr. Temple wrote.

Prayer in real life

Its flagship publication, Guideposts magazine, has nearly 2 million subscribers and an estimated 5 million readers each year.

It sprang to life in 1945, after people began writing letters to Dr. Peale, then a famous preacher and radio host, about their real-life stories of faith.

“He would walk around with these letters, and say, ‘These are great stories,’” said Mr. Grinnan. But “all his buddies in the publishing business looked at him and said, ‘Well, you can’t have normal people telling stories about how they solved a problem in their life. That doesn’t work. You’re supposed to have these experts, these graybeards, spewing out wisdom to people.’”

Dr. Peale ignored the nay-sayers, and published the hand-written stories in a magazine — making Guideposts an original — if not the original — vehicle for user-generated content.

Today, stories still pour in.

Those selected for publication are fact-checked and verified as much

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Good Friday Day of Prayer held Friday March 25

By Cheryl Wetzstein

For more than 60 years, the Guideposts’ OurPrayer Ministry has lifted up the prayer requests of millions of people with the conviction that God will respond to our heartfelt prayers, small and large.

This Friday, March 25, the prayer ministry will come together for the 46th time to hold its Good Friday Day of Prayer.

While some representatives of the massive prayer community will gather in Pawling, N.Y., to pray for thousands of people who have made prayer requests, ministry volunteers across the nation and world will also offer prayers, hope and inspiration for those who asked for prayer support.

The prayer requests — which are typically made online at the Guideposts’ website, but are sometimes mailed in — are about everything and anything: relationships and heartaches, health problems and emergencies, financial worries and employment, missing a valuable or just feeling lost.

A recent request asked for prayers for “my unborn baby that passed at 9 weeks,” as well for the family’s recovery and hope for another child.

People can file their prayer requests with the Guideposts’ ministry at www.ourprayer.org.

“We are delighted to stand in the gap for those who are in need” and seek God’s help for individuals facing challenges within their family, finances, health, community and beyond, she said. “God has and certainly will answer our prayers.”

For those who wish to write back about their prayer requests, there is an “Answered Prayer” area. Several people have written in to thank God for events, like surviving a medical procedure or

landing a job. One woman gave thanks that a beloved man in her life found “a good job” and was led “to a Godly woman.”

“I was struggling with ingratitude and very serious depression,” wrote another person named “J.” “I asked for prayer and God showed me his love through others and pointed out all His efforts to lift me. It is like the sun came out again. Thank you,” the person wrote to the OurPrayer Ministry.

“Each year, it is a great privilege to receive thousands of prayer requests from our community,” said Ty’ Ann Brown, manager of OurPrayer.

“We are delighted to stand in the gap for those who are in need” and seek God’s help for individuals facing challenges within their family, finances, health, community and beyond, she said. “God has and certainly will answer our prayers.”

The 2016 Good Friday event, which will be held all day at the Mizzentop Day School (formerly the Peale Center) in Pawling, N.Y., will include an inspirational service, uplifting materials, a

space for personal reflection, a dedicated area to pray for others, and individuals who are ready to pray for people who come in person.

For these and the millions of prayer requests received each year, the OurPrayer volunteers, staff and online prayer community will carefully lift up each one, relying on the Guideposts’ prayer promise, which says: “We believe in the power of prayer and promise to pray according to the will of God as set forth in the Holy Bible. We will lift each prayer request by name and need, in Jesus’ name, without prejudice or judgment. We will keep all prayer requests confidential.”

The OurPrayer Ministry, a service of Guideposts, is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year online at www.ourprayer.org. OurPrayer is also on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

The ministry also holds a special day of prayer around Thanksgiving.

Cheryl Wetzstein is Special Sections Manager for TWT Media Group.

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as possible: “We can’t check to see if God did indeed talk to you, but we can certainly check to see if the flood happened in Minnesota that day,” said Rick Hamlin, executive editor of Guideposts magazine and a staff member for more than 30 years.

Famous people often share their stories — Dr. Peale “knew a lot of famous people, and he knew that if you put a famous face on the cover of a magazine, people who aren’t inclined necessarily to pick up a magazine named ‘Guideposts’ will pick it up,” said Mr. Grinnan.



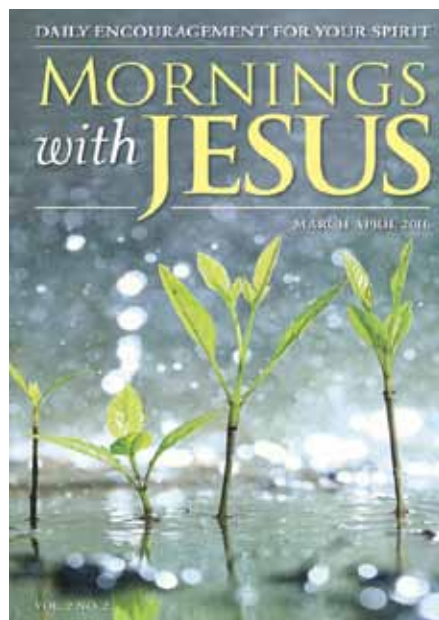
Rev. Dr. Pablo R. Diaz

Guideposts magazines are welcomed by chaplains because “it’s really first-person faith stories, so anyone seeking faith can open it, anyone of faith can engage with it, and someone of no faith can read it for practical, inspirational purposes,” said Rev. Diaz, an ordained pastor in the Presbyterian Church USA.

Most narratives, however, come from people who live in everyday circumstances, but who had an extraordinary experience.

Take the issue of forgiveness, said Mr. Hamlin. Some stories are big and newsworthy — like the person who forgave the person who murdered their loved one.

But Guideposts stories are just as likely to show the power of forgiveness in an intensely personal way — like “forgiving my sister who took Mom’s tea service right out of Mom’s house after she died when it was meant for me,” said Mr. Hamlin.



“That’s a real forgiveness story, and it’s not something that you are going to see in a newspaper,” he said. “People don’t realize what a valuable story that is,” he added, until they remember how there’s a family member no one has spoken to for years, and it’s been so long “people don’t even remember what the argument was about.”

Other magazines — “Angels on Earth,” “Mysterious Ways,” “Plus — The Power of Faith,” and the new “Mornings with Jesus” — have also attracted hundreds of thousands of readers.

Military outreach

Guideposts’ outreach into the military, which started in 1950 with the Korean war, now results in 2 million pieces of inspirational materials distributed each year to active military personnel and their families, and in Veterans Administration hospitals and rehabilitation centers.

“We have a long history of engagement and supporting military chaplains,” said Rev. Diaz, who recently traveled with Colonel (Ret.) Kenneth Sampson, a retired Army chaplain, to visit military bases in New Mexico and Texas.

Guideposts magazines are welcomed



Rick Hamlin

by chaplains because “it’s really first-person faith stories, so anyone seeking faith can open it, anyone of faith can engage with it, and someone of no faith can read it for practical, inspirational purposes,” said Rev. Diaz, an ordained pastor in the Presbyterian Church USA.

Other favorite products are the 365-day “Daily Guideposts” books (created in pocket-size and with a camouflage cover), and booklets with specific themes, such as “resiliency” or being “mission-ready,” that were designed with the help of military chaplains.

The vast majority of these materials are provided at no charge to military personnel, thanks to donations to the Danbury, Conn.-based organization’s military outreach program and gift subscriptions.

“We are trying to meet people where they’re at,” said Rev. Diaz. Whether military personnel are stationed at home or deployed to foreign countries or battlefields, Guideposts’ stories can touch their hearts and remind them “that they, too, will get through their own personal



Edward Grinnan

issues and crises.”

“It’s a bridge that links people,” he said.

After all, millions of Guideposts readers would have read how:

- The adoptive father — a handsome but very tall man — learned to say, “In your time, Lord, not mine,” as he waited for his once-traumatized daughter to happily jump into his arms, as she finally did one day.

- The mother of the now-7-year-old son has risen past his severe disabilities, and sees “the unabashed, straightforward love that pours out of him” for everyone in his life.

- The prison chaplain — who spoke inspired words of gratitude to his would-be killer in the cell — found that the “cell doors” of his own heart were opened, and for 23 years, he could bring sincere compassion and hope to hundreds of prisoners.

- The man who heard the train whistle raced to the elderly couple’s



car to push it across the tracks — but it wouldn’t move, and, paralyzed by fear, neither would they.

“All at once, something happened. Something strange,” Chris Ihle of Ames, Iowa, said in his narrative called, “The Crossing,” in the July 2015 Guideposts.

“It was as though a force lifted me up from the crossing into the air and set me down on a lamppost. I could see everything from 20 feet above at the same time as I was experiencing it.”

“Is this what happens when you die?” Mr. Ihle recalled thinking to himself. “You watch an instant replay of your final moments?”

Instead, Mr. Ihle saw from his extraordinary vantage point that it was possible to push the car backwards, off the track.

He then watched himself race to the front of the car and, with every ounce of strength, push it off the tracks. This meant the car was safe, but he was still fully exposed to the oncoming train.

“If it clips my boot heels, I’m gone,” the father of three told himself, as he pressed himself into the front of the car.

“The train roared by, just inches from my boots ... Then I was completely back in my body again, returned to earth as suddenly as I had been taken up,” Mr. Ihle wrote.

Co-workers later told him they had watched in horror from their windows, fearing that everyone would be lost in a terrible tragedy.

Mr. Ihle ended his story by noting that although he’s “not really a spiritual guy,” he clearly had a spiritual experience.

That incident gave him confidence to take a different kind of risk — make a career change — which benefited him and his children, and allowed him to “make the most of the life I’ve been given.”

Cheryl Wetzstein, formerly national news reporter at The Washington Times, is Special Sections Manager for TWT Media Group.



By Bryan Schwartz

In today's society where most things can be cured or at least repaired through human effort, sometimes we come face-to-face with an issue or situation that seems impossible. We find ourselves needing a miracle.

Almost four years ago, I found myself in one of these seemingly impossible situations. Here I was, a retired NFL middle linebacker, whose head was used as a weapon for over 15 years dating all the way back to grade school, in need of a miracle. I was in a season of life trying to suppress the reality that I might have CTE (chronic traumatic encephalopathy), which cannot be diagnosed except posthumously.

At this time CTE was making headlines, as several of my peers were either killing themselves or struggling

immensely with horrific mental and emotional disorders. I found myself in the middle of a battle that I seemed to be losing. I was struggling with symptoms of CTE, including depression and suicidal thoughts, on a regular, if not weekly, occurrence.

Adding weight to my feelings of shame, guilt and helplessness was my vocation as a full-time minister representing Jesus Christ. I was proclaiming a message of salvation, healing and deliverance that I myself was not experiencing.

In the fall of 2012, I was attending a Christian conference in Denver and thoroughly enjoying a message that a minister named Bill Johnson was preaching. He ended his message and did what we Christians call an "altar call" with a specific emphasis on prayer for traumatic head injuries.

Right when he mentioned the words "traumatic head injuries," my head began to have the simultaneous sensations of both feeling like it was on fire — and feeling as though shards of glass were being removed from my skull. I was seriously looking around for a bucket of water to dunk my head in.

Both sensations intensified as Pastor Johnson began to pray, asking God to heal us who were suffering. He then began to proclaim that Jesus Christ was setting us completely free.

As he continued to pray and proclaim, all of a sudden it was as if the peace of heaven itself had invaded my head. The brutal sensations were evicted and hope and joy took residence. I was healed instantly.

You may ask, "How do you know you were healed?"

I know I was healed because in the four years since that conference, I have not struggled with depression or suicidal thoughts. In fact, my life has been transformed radically to the point that I now boldly pray for others to be healed from all types of diagnosed brain issues and have seen some amazing results.

Prayer in my life works not because of a formula or because I am special, but rather because of Whom I am praying to. His name is Jesus Christ and He loves us so much that He allows us to experience healing and freedom through His death on the cross over 2000 years ago.

If we never have to face fear, then courage would not be needed. If we never have to face the impossible, then prayer would not be necessary. It is in the face of these impossible issues and situations that prayer becomes a doorway that allows God to invade the Earth with miracles.

Prayer gives us the opportunity to experience the reality that He is the same yesterday, today and forever. The miracles He performed in the past are an available reality for the present.

Sometimes all we need to do is take a step of faith and ask.

Bryan Schwartz played for the Jacksonville Jaguars for five years. He and his wife, Diane, have been married for 21 years and have seven children. The couple, who live in Jacksonville, Fla., lead Antioch Breakthrough Ministries, which focuses on the training of leaders in multiple arenas of cultural influence, including politics, athletics, business, church, entertainment and family. They also serve on the board of the National Prayer Center in the District. Follow him @BryanSchwartz58.

The power of a simple prayer

By Anne Beiler

As a child, I was blessed to have a mother who taught me to pray the simple children's bedtime prayer:

"Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray dear Lord my soul to keep,
If I should die before I wake,
I pray dear Lord my soul you'll take."

Sixty-five years later, as I was caring for my 92-year-old mother in our home, I felt the power of this prayer she had taught me. Each night we would snuggle in bed and talk about the happenings of the day, then together pray the prayer, "Now I lay me down to sleep..."

She would fold her hands, close her eyes, and together we prayed — just as I did when I was a little girl kneeling beside my childhood bed. It was the first prayer my mother taught me to memorize ... and the last one I prayed with her as we cared for her in her final days.

What, to me, was a simple prayer became the glue between us while she lived in our home the last 3 ½ months of her life. And, much to my surprise, I discovered that I could still recite this prayer in my mother's native German tongue; I had no idea the impact that would have on me, recounting this

prayer in German night after night. When I memorized the prayer as a child, I had learned it in the German language but, through the years, I began only reciting it in English with my grandchildren.

As I sat with my mother, we reminisced a great deal and began singing songs in German. It was then I discovered that the songs and prayers I learned as a child in German were still as strong and true as they were when I was a kid; memories of them were etched deeply in my mind and inerasable with time.

I also noticed I felt a deeper connection to God in my prayers as I began to lift them up more frequently in my mother's tongue. What started with my mother in her dying days, simply praying my childhood prayer in German, became my way of praying for the next three years.

The last night of my mother's life holds very special memories for me. As my sister and I stood by her bed, watching her shallow breathing and knowing her time was near, we said the prayer, "If she should die before she wakes, I pray dear Lord her soul you'll take." We had confidence in the prayer after

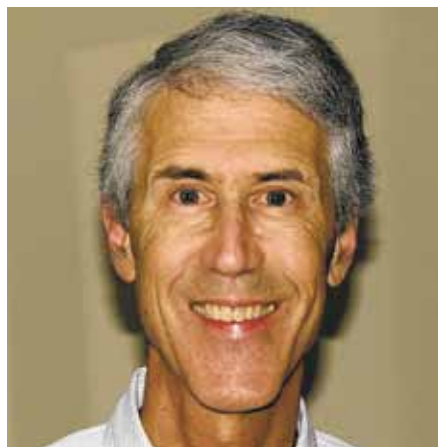
it having been present throughout our entire lives and, at the moment, we had no fear.

Prayer is not complicated nor does it require beautiful, polished, or descriptive words — it only requires a simple childlike faith that God hears our prayers. Some of the simplest prayers can give us great comfort in a life often filled with complexities that can overwhelm the soul.

I saw the answer in that simple prayer as I watched my mother, in her final moments, lay down to sleep and I knew God kept her soul. The prayer gave her life as she was transitioning from this world to go be with our Heavenly Father and, at the same time, gave me peace for this life as I watched my mother slip away at midnight on October 16, 2012.

Anne Beiler is the founder of Auntie Anne's pretzels and author (with Shawn Smucker) of "Twist of Faith: The Story of Anne Beiler, Founder of Auntie Anne's Pretzels" (Thomas Nelson, 2008). This article is in memoriam of Amanda Smucker.





By Joe Murchison

Don McClanen loved to pray. But it wasn't always pretty. Don was an important but little-known figure in 20th century American Christianity.

He lived in or near Germantown, MD, from 1962 until his death in February 2016 at the age of 91.

Before coming to the Washington, D.C., area, he had founded and led the Kansas City-based Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) for its first seven years. The sports ministry is now the largest of its kind in the world, with 2 million annual participants in 56 countries.

Don also created a series of other ministries, ranging from leadership training for inner-city youth to church-renewal movements. Most notable was his Ministry of Money, whose conferences and international trips to cities of great poverty challenged hundreds of American Christians from across the country to reevaluate their mindset concerning wealth and want.

As a spiritual entrepreneur, Don was an action guy. He loved to conceive the vision, gather the troops, hunt down the resources and build the programs. He loved the challenge of a \$100,000 budget gap or a washed-out bridge. In the process, he could be a model of warmth, compassion and fun, someone whose enthusiastic and caring presence amplified your life.

But all strong personalities have their shadow side. At times, Don's single-minded intensity and fits of anger alienated others and ruptured relationships. He suffered periods of anguish, doubt and depression. His self-understanding was that his life was that of a deeply flawed individual who nevertheless became an instrument that God could use in numerous powerful ways. His prayer life reflected the flaws and the power.

In 1960, Don and his wife, Gloria, were struggling. They had lost their 10-year-old daughter to a congenital heart disease, a devastating blow after losing a son in infancy. And they felt they were being pushed out of FCA by tensions with the board of directors.

One day several months after their

daughter's death, Don was swept by an unusually strong wave of grief and began screaming at God, using every curse word he could think of. Two years later, after moving to Maryland and starting work as a low-paid farm laborer, Don walked to an isolated spot after an argument with his wife and again screamed, "God, God, God, I hate

One of the key inner-journey disciplines the church taught was that of silent retreats and wordless "centering prayer." Don learned the power of this approach to waiting patiently for God's still, quiet voice instead of focusing on all his self-talk.

you. What are you trying to say to me? What else do I have to do? You've taken my kids, you've taken my life's work. Now it seems you might be taking my marriage."

In retrospect, Don saw his uncontrolled outbursts at God as healthy

— he could be real with God, and God, despite being reviled, loved him for his honesty. Don felt like a child coming to his father with a grievance, trusting in his father's ability to work through their differences without resentment. As Don shared an openness and vulnerability in prayer with others, they were often liberated to stop prettying up their prayers and to be brutally honest with God.

Another striking aspect of Don's prayer life was his devotion to silence.

He learned this discipline of non-verbal prayer from the Washington, D.C.-area church he joined, the Church of the Saviour. This small congregation was devoted to the concept of joining an inward journey of increasing spiritual depth with an outward journey of ministering to the hurting world. The result was a remarkably ambitious array of outreaches, from housing to medical care to job training, to the city's lower-income residents.

One of the key inner-journey disciplines the church taught was that of silent retreats and wordless "centering prayer." Don learned the power of this approach to waiting patiently for God's still, quiet voice instead of focusing on all his self-talk. For instance, it was during a seven-day silent retreat that

the Holy Spirit planted in him the seed of the Ministry of Money. He found that starting meetings of his ministry teams with 15 minutes of silence often made them more focused, inspired and productive.

Outpourings of raw emotion and silent waiting — those were the two poles of Don's prayer life. And in between were ordinary, daily offerings of praise and petition, which over the years thousands were privileged to witness through his ministries. "Oh, Jesus, we love you, we love you, we love you. ... Lord, we pray for all those who go without food and other necessities this day, and also for those who have so much food and other possessions that they don't even know the poor exist. ... Thank you for the anger, thank you for the guilt, thank you for awakening me."

No, Don's prayers weren't always pretty. But they were always real.

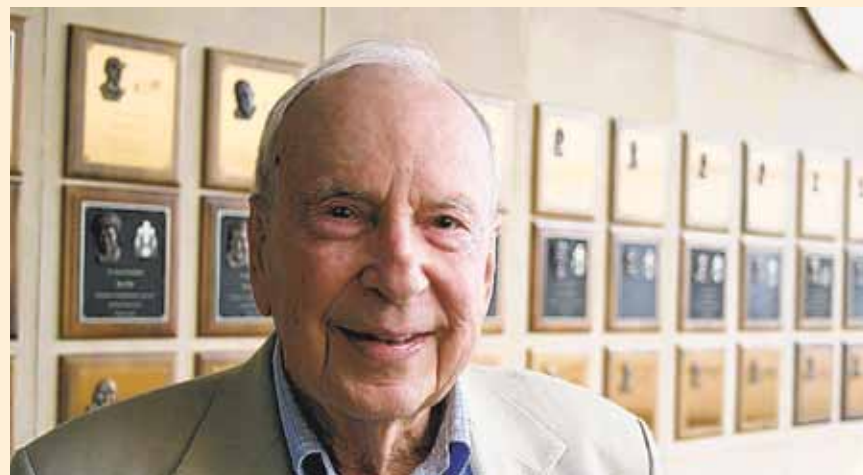
Joe Murchison wrote a biography of Don McClanen, entitled "Caution to the Wind: Faith Lessons From the Life of Don McClanen, Founder of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and Ministry of Money" (Cross Training Publishing, 2008).

Uniting faith and athletics

For six decades, the Fellowship of Christian Athletes has used camping as a way to encourage athletic prowess, good character and faith-affirming decisions in youth and coaches.

The momentum is stronger than ever: The FCA's 2015 Camp Ministry had "a record-shattering year," with nearly 95,000 people attending 619 camps in 41 states and 36 countries, the organization said. Around 10,000 campers decided to follow Jesus Christ, while another 12,198 recommitted themselves to the Lord.

This year's camp theme is "Rise," from Joshua 1:9, and some 100,000 people are expected to attend at least one of the camps, which are organized around seven areas: coaches' training, athletic training, leadership training, youth day camps, partnering with ministries and organizations, team competitions, and



Don McClanen, the late founder of Fellowship of Christian Athletes.

international camp development.

In addition to camping, the FCA, based in Kansas City, Mo., has robust ministries to coaches, campuses and communities.

This worldwide, faith-based sports ministry grew from the heart of a Christian basketball coach who couldn't stop wondering why the big-name athletes of the 1940s and 1950s would use their influence to promote "shaving cream, razor blades and cigarettes," but not the good news of Jesus Christ.

"So my idea is to form an organization

that would project you as Christian men before the youth and athletes of our nation," Don McClanen wrote to many of those athletes in 1954.

The late Mr. McClanen's passionate, persistent efforts led him to key early supporters — and decades later, the FCA remains a powerfully dynamic Christian program touching the lives of millions every year.

Cheryl Wetzstein is Special Sections Manager for TWT Media Group.

Every prayer is a second chance



By Erin Weidemann

What is prayer? Every prayer, in its purest form, is a second chance; it's a chance to choose to believe in God and what He has promised.

The day I prayed for the first time — I mean when I opened my mouth, spoke, and knew God was listening — was June 9, 2007. It was my most important second chance.

Though I grew up attending church

with my family, and I had uttered words in prayer many times before, I never really believed that God was listening.

That day, inside my family home, face down on my parents' bathroom floor, I rested my flushed cheek against the cool, creamy tile.

I was 26, only a few years removed from my time as a college athlete on scholarship, with my eyes decidedly fixed on the typical measures of success: wealth, self-sufficiency, independence. A fierce competitor since early childhood, I had spent the previous years willfully separated from God, pursuing all of these goals, and doing so with a dangerous, overcompensating attitude that proudly declared, "I know exactly what I'm doing, and I don't need help. I can do it by myself."

A few months before that day, the doctor told me in the exam room, without having done one X-ray or MRI, that he knew it was cancer. My heart sank. I felt sick. Defeated. How could this be happening? How could it be happening to ME, the girl in control of her own life?

That moment on the floor was three months after my first cancer diagnosis and surgery. I had finished enough physical therapy to have the

radiation treatment needed to kill any residual disease.

Only there I was, 12 hours into a three-day quarantine, on the floor. I was by myself, but I couldn't do anything. Dizzy, I couldn't breathe. I had worked myself into a frantic panic and, even though I had never fainted before, I suddenly knew it was coming. I felt it, and there was nothing I could do.

My body hit my parents' bathroom floor, and I remember pressing my face against that icy, flat surface as the words escaped. "God, please," I whispered, "I know you're here." I wept. "Please help me." The words were like prisoners wrongly accused, released into the arms of their loved ones after spending too much time locked away under false truths. "God, please help me," I cried. "I'm so sorry."

Until that moment, I didn't believe that God was really listening. As I softly spoke those words, the terror subsided. I sat up, and I knew God was right there with me. I knew He heard me. I knew that I was going to survive. It was my second chance.

After my initial diagnosis and four subsequent recurrences, I had completely written off the idea of being a wife or a mother. But as it turned out,

He had both marriage and motherhood in my future. Even as I doubted Him, I prayed, knowing God was listening intently and guiding me toward His purpose, my destiny.

This prayer inspired me to take additional chances: one to become a teacher to impact the lives of children, and the other to create something for this world that would lead others toward Him. On the heels of our daughter's birth, something I thought would never happen, my husband and I created and launched Bible Belles, a company dedicated to helping girls discover who God really is, and through our first book, "Hannah: The Belle Of Prayer," helping them talk to Him and know He is there so they can find out who they really are.

Prayer is about talking to God, knowing He is listening, and trusting that we are never, ever alone.

Erin Weidemann is the founder and CEO of Bible Belles and author of the award-winning children's book series "The Adventures Of Rooney Cruz." She is also the host of the Heroes For Her podcast. For more information, visit www.BibleBelles.com.

The prayer of Saint Patrick



By Tim Muldoon

"My name is Patrick. I am a sinner, a simple country person, and the least of all believers."

So begins the Confession, one of only two extant writings we have of the patron saint of Ireland. Unlike the well-known Lorica, or "Deer's Cry" (also known as the "Breastplate of Saint Patrick"), which was probably written by a follower of the saint after

his death, the Confession comes from the hand of the saint himself.

Unlike his contemporary Saint Augustine, Patrick was unlearned; his writing is simple and filled with many quotes from the Bible almost verbatim. What we see in his writing is someone who has so internalized scripture that it shapes the character of his narrative. He writes: "I turned with all my heart to the Lord my God, and he looked down on my lowliness," quoting both Joel 2:12 and the beautiful Magnificat of Mary in Luke 1:48. He comments that "If I seem to some to be too forward, with my lack of knowledge and my even slower tongue, still it is written: 'Stammering tongues will quickly learn to speak peace,'" quoting Isaiah 32:4 and echoing the self-description of Moses.

What we can discern about his prayer life comes from the tender yet powerful ways he speaks of God: "He protected me and consoled me as a father does for his son." He speaks intimately and lovingly of the Father who called him out of slavery to speak to his people, not unlike Jeremiah:

"I cannot be silent — nor would it be good to do so — about such great blessings and such a gift that the Lord so kindly bestowed in the land of my captivity."

He had to learn a foreign language; he confesses to having been a poor learner, and was self-conscious about his ignorance: "I blush and am afraid to expose my lack of experience, because I can't express myself with the brief words I would like in my heart and soul." Yet he is grateful and joyous at what the Father has done, and so his life as a preacher of the gospel is his way to give back.

As a youth, his passion for God was boundless: "More and more the love of God increased, and my sense of awe before God. Faith grew, and my spirit was moved, so that in one day I would pray up to one hundred times, and at night perhaps the same."

It is no surprise, then, that in the Lorica we find calls to pray everywhere: "Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left,

Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me, Christ in the mouth of every man who speaks of me, Christ in the eye that sees me, Christ in the ear that hears me." His life was filled with prayer.

Even after his return home from slavery, that passion for God brought him back to Ireland to become a deacon, priest and bishop. Late in life he expresses a desire to return home to Britain, but reflects on "Christ the Lord, who told me to come here to be with these people for the rest of my life."

And so he did: "I testify in truth and in great joy of heart before God and his holy angels that I never had any other reason for returning to that nation from which I had earlier escaped, except the gospel and God's promises."

Ireland was born, as it were, out of the prayer of this saint.

Tim Muldoon is a theologian and author of a number of books on Catholic theology and spirituality. He teaches at Boston College.

St. Patrick's Breastplate: A prayer for divine protection

St. Patrick's Breastplate is a popular prayer attributed to one of Ireland's most beloved patron saints. According to tradition, St. Patrick wrote it in 433 A.D. for divine protection before successfully converting the Irish King Leoghaire and his subjects from paganism to Christianity. (The term breastplate refers to a piece of armor worn in battle.)

More recent scholarship suggests its author was anonymous. In any case, this prayer certainly reflects the spirit with which St. Patrick brought our faith to Ireland. St. Patrick's Breastplate, also known as "The Lorica of Saint Patrick," was popular enough to inspire a hymn based on this text. (This prayer has also been called "The Cry of the Deer.")

I arise today
Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity,
Through belief in the Threeness,
Through confession of the Oneness
of the Creator of creation.

I arise today
Through the strength of Christ's birth
with His baptism,
Through the strength of His crucifixion
with His burial,
Through the strength of His resurrection
with His ascension,
Through the strength of His descent
for the judgment of doom.

I arise today
Through the strength of the love of
cherubim,
In the obedience of angels,
In the service of archangels,
In the hope of resurrection to meet
with reward,
In the prayers of patriarchs,
In the predictions of prophets,
In the preaching of apostles,
In the faith of confessors,
In the innocence of holy virgins,
In the deeds of righteous men.

I arise today, through
The strength of heaven,
The light of the sun,
The radiance of the moon,
The splendor of fire,
The speed of lightning,
The swiftness of wind,
The depth of the sea,
The stability of the earth,
The firmness of rock.



I arise today through
God's strength to pilot me,
God's might to uphold me,
God's wisdom to guide me,
God's eye to look before me,
God's ear to hear me,
God's word to speak for me,
God's hand to guard me,
God's shield to protect me,
God's host to save me
From snares of devils,
From temptation of vices,
From everyone who shall wish me ill,
afar and near.

I summon today
All these powers between me and
those evils,
Against every cruel and merciless
power
that may oppose my body and soul,
Against incantations of false prophets,
Against black laws of pagandom,
Against false laws of heretics,
Against craft of idolatry,
Against spells of witches and smiths
and wizards,
Against every knowledge that corrupts
man's body and soul;
Christ to shield me today
Against poison, against burning,
Against drowning, against wounding,
So that there may come to me an abundance of reward.

Christ with me,
Christ before me,
Christ behind me,
Christ in me,
Christ beneath me,
Christ above me,
Christ on my right,
Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down,
Christ when I sit down,
Christ when I arise,
Christ in the heart of every man who
thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who
speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.

I arise today
Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity,
Through belief in the Threeness,
Through confession of the Oneness
of the Creator of creation.

Reprinted with permission from Our-CatholicPrayers.com, which features commentary and an wide array of prayers to give strength and comfort in turbulent times.

An improbable encounter leads to an 'impossible' ending



By Darren Wilson

I was filming my third feature film — the documentary, “Father of Lights” — and I knew I was heading into the final shoot, which was going to take place in Israel.

I also knew that I didn’t have an ending yet. I was making a movie about the character and nature of God, and I had already filmed God doing extraordinary things through a wide variety of people. But I wanted this ending to be something amazing. I wanted to film something that was truly impossible.

Two days before I left for Israel, I sat in my studio and prayed. It was a simple prayer, but one filled with belief and anticipation. “God, for the end of this film, would you please allow me to film something impossible in Israel? Something no one can ever deny. You know I don’t want this to sell more movies or to be more famous. I just want the

world to see you in all of your glory and goodness.”

The shoot in Israel was five days long, and for the first three days we filmed some really cool stuff, but nothing that screamed “this is your ending!”

We then headed down to Jerusalem for the final two days, and at this point I was beginning to sweat. God, are you going to do anything?

Our final night before we left for Jerusalem, I had learned about the Dome of the Rock. Widely considered the second-holiest site in Islam, it was also the location of the original Jewish Tabernacle, the Ark of the Covenant, where Abraham almost sacrificed his son, Isaac, and other major historical events took place.

This was obviously a prime piece of real estate. But I also learned that it was pretty much impossible for a non-Muslim to get inside (let alone a Christian filmmaker with cameras in tow).

This “impossibility” became my focus. It was the only thing I had encountered that was impossible, and that’s what I had asked God to do. So why not go for it?

So we arrived in Jerusalem, mic’d up my friend, evangelist Todd White, and away we went towards the Muslim

quarter of the old city. At the Damascus gate, we encountered a man wearing a yellow shirt who was limping. Todd prayed for him, and the man’s legs and back were healed, making him obviously very, very happy. He then went his merry way.

We entered the old city and began praying for more people, all of them Muslim. People were being healed of sickness and pain left and right, and for over an hour we stood in the middle of the cobblestone streets praying for people.

Then a man approached us and asked us to follow him. Why not? We were in it pretty deep at this point anyway.

He took us to his home where his father-in-law was very sick. Todd prayed for him and the man felt a little better. I then asked if our new friend knew any way to get into the Dome of the Rock?

“It’s impossible,” he said.

“Yeah, that’s what everyone keeps telling me. But seriously, how can I get in?”

Then he looked at me for a moment and said, “I tell you what. You just blessed me, now I want to bless you. My best friend knows everyone who works at the Dome. If there is anyone in this city who might be able to get you in, it’s this guy. Would you like to meet him?”

“Yes please!” So away we went.

I followed this man through winding streets for 15 minutes, until we came to a courtyard and he called out to his friend. His friend then appeared, and in that instant I knew not only that God answers prayers, but that He is also the God of the impossible.

His friend was the man in the yellow shirt.

The next day, we walked into the Dome, cameras in tow, with the full blessing of the head of security over the Dome of the Rock. We filmed inside, and even proclaimed Jesus as Lord of all in the holy of holies there. It was, and perhaps will always be, one of the greatest events I have ever witnessed in my entire life.

And it all began with a simple prayer to an invisible God on the other side of the world.

.....
Darren Wilson is founder of Wanderlust Productions, a film/television production company that creates media that creatively and powerfully advances the kingdom of God around the world. His latest film, “Holy Ghost Reborn,” was released in October. To find out more about Darren and his films, visit wpfilm.com.

Prayer and faith in the midst of personal tragedy



By Dan McConchie

I don’t remember the accident. Whatever drugs they gave me erased my memory of it.

What I do know is what the witnesses said. As I rode on my motorcycle through the suburban intersection, a car came into my lane and pushed me into oncoming traffic.

When I woke two weeks later in a Level 1 trauma center, I was a mess. Six broken ribs, deflated left lung, broken

clavicle, broken shoulder blade and five broken vertebrae. Worst of all, amidst all the broken bones, I had a spinal-cord injury that left me a paraplegic. The neurosurgeon told my wife that it would be a “miracle” if I ever walked again.

While I regularly pray, there can be something special about prayers offered in a chapel. Sometimes the act of making a special trip to a house of faith signifies that your prayers are especially serious, considered and come from the heart.

It was another couple of weeks before I had an opportunity to make a journey like that. Eventually, I got to the point I could get into a power wheelchair and use the joystick to motor around the vast hospital complex on my own.

It was about 6 o’clock in the evening, now about a month after the accident, when I finally made it to the hospital chapel. The lights softly illuminated the walls. The room was empty, but not lonely.

After a bit, I prayed a simple prayer: “Lord, I want to be able to walk again. I

want to walk back and forth to work. I want to be able to travel. I want to run and play with my kids.”

The answer was immediate, but not what I expected. There was no healing, no return of feeling or function. Instead, I was given an amazing sense of peace. There was no question in my mind that during the dark hours of this tragedy, I was loved.

A couple of days later, I was sent home to recuperate. Over time, the bones healed, but my spinal cord did not. That was eight years ago.

I still work. I drive myself around with hand controls. I travel across the country and around the world. I even ran in the primary for Illinois State Senate this spring. I have refused to let my injury slow me down. In fact, my wife jokes that she wishes I could walk again so she could keep up with me.

While I wish this tragedy had never happened, or that I would have fully recovered from it, I can’t dispute the fruit it has produced. I’m more compassionate with others. I care less about what I want, and more about what the Lord

wants. And I pray with a conviction and vitality that I never had before.

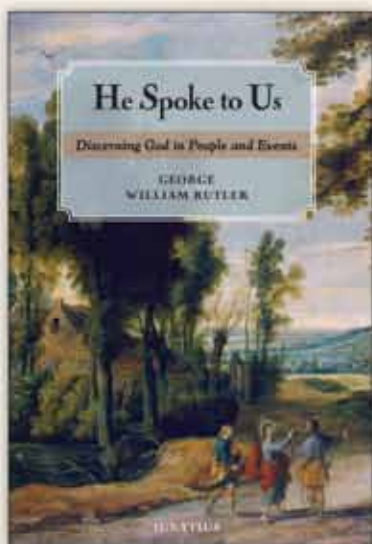
What I learned is that this life isn’t for our comfort. Instead, the purpose of this life is that we become conformed to the image of Christ. Unfortunately, that doesn’t happen when everything is unicorns and rainbows. It instead happens when life is tough, when we are forced to rely upon God through prayer just to make it through the day. That is when he is most at work in our lives molding us into who he designed us to be.

My prayers are different today than they were eight years ago. Back then, I looked at God like Santa Claus. I asked him to send nice things my way. Now, I have one prayer that I pray more than any other: “Lord, may I be able to say at the end of today that I was faithful.”

That new temperament has made all the pain worthwhile.

.....
Dan McConchie is vice president of government affairs at Americans United for Life. On March 15, he won the Republican primary for Illinois’ 26th Senate District.

SEEKING & FOLLOWING THE TRUE JESUS



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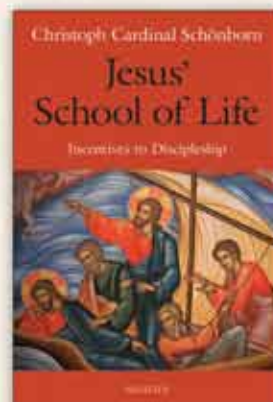
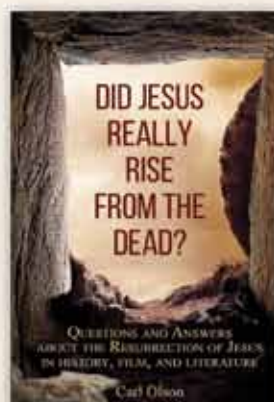
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