

GRACE

Great Good News!

November 2003

Trust in the LORD with all your heart; and lean not on your understanding (Proverbs 3:5).

My wife Joy had to be re-admitted to the hospital November 18 through 28 to surgically clean out a staph infection from her back originating from a surgery in June 2002. Last month, we thought her low stamina and periodic fevers were due to a reaction to antibiotics. However, it was the staph infection breaking through. The infection had been pulling her down for months, although medical tests indicated no infection. During the recent surgeries, the doctor determined the infection was "hiding out" from the antibiotics on 2 of the 4 stainless steel screws...screws inserted in her back in June 2002 to stabilize the back while her spinal fusion solidifies. The doctor was able to take all 4 screws out during the recent surgeries because the spinal fusion appears to have solidified well. Now that the root problem has been addressed, Joy is feeling better right now. She is still weak and has periodic leg pains and headaches as she recovers from the additional surgeries, but she is so relieved to know the reason for her feeling so weak this past year.

A friend lovingly shared Proverbs 3:5 (see above) with me during this time, and this verse became more real to me. No longer is it a LEGALISTIC COMMAND for me to strive to perform (i.e., if I work up enough trust, God will bless me)...it is now becoming a precious LIVING PROMISE that I find myself embracing (i.e., this is already a supernatural reality because of Christ living in and through me). I guess I was so overwhelmed during this time that even trying to trust was a burden. *Trying to trust...uhm...sounds contradictory, doesn't it?!* I believe Jesus is transforming *trust* in my life from being a *burden for which I strive* to being the miracle of grace it really is...*a gift of which I receive!* And I am growing to "lean not on my understanding" of how and when God should heal Joy. God our Father has Joy's best interests perfectly in mind...I am growing to rest in that.



Joy in the hospital with a rose from her daddy's rose bush we transplanted in our yard this past Spring. This single rose was in full bloom the day of Joy's surgery.

The Church Being the Hospital in the World

The counseling help line of *In-Touch Ministries* in Atlanta received a desperate call from a woman near where I live in South Carolina. A precious phone counselor shared Christ as the living hope with the woman. The counselor then called *Christ Life Ministries (CLM)* to request I continue to minister hope to this woman who was on the verge of losing everything she had. I felt so ill equipped. The director of *CLM* encouraged me not to see this as my responsibility to figure out how to help the woman, but to see it as my response to the ability of Christ to minister His life to this woman through other people as well.

So, I took a breath of grace (so to speak), and through an amazing series of calls and contacts, I was led to Bruce Forbes, manager of *Place of Hope*, a United Ministries day shelter and counseling center for the homeless, well equipped for this situation. I then was led to enlist a dear friend to go with me to drive this woman to meet with Bruce. The woman was not emotionally able nor did she have the means to do this on her own. Bruce's interview with this woman was so compassionate, and also established a plan for the woman to be accountable. A plan was ultimately worked out that kept this woman from being homeless with her young daughter.

In addition, a woman who is training with *CLM* took this woman a bag of groceries and found a family who has "adopted" this woman and her daughter. This family presented the woman and daughter with a gift – a Christmas tree.

When I was in the *Place of Hope* observing the initial interview, I received a cell phone call from Joy's doctor informing me of Joy's infection. My heart sank. There I was...with a cell phone in a crowd of precious people getting free tooth brushes...escorting a woman who was on the brink of losing it all...with a dear friend who is legally blind accompanying me ...with my heart wanting to rush home to be with Joy. Not a script I would have written. However, I believe God planned it that way...I just held on to my blind friend (who "sees" my heart)...and as God was ministering the life of His dear Son to the woman in need, He was also ministering this same life to me through my friend. What a picture of the church...people ministering the life of Christ in ways we could never plan.

I share my testimonies not to report about me, but to share truths to encourage you in your life situations. I have one more testimony on the back.

Boys Home Testimony

It has been a profound joy to be part of a team of very special people for fellowship and ministry at the Boys Home of the South for the past 8 months. It's been a miracle how this ministry team has come together...from different places and backgrounds, growing together in the grace of Jesus, and witnessing this grace overflow to the boys. We are still praying for others to join us in this ministry.

On November 18th, the Boys Home hosted their annual Thanksgiving banquet. *Our ministry team was awarded the Volunteers of the Year at the banquet!* I was asked to give a testimony of thanks and prayer before the meal; however, Joy and I were not able to attend because that was the same day she was admitted to the hospital. It was another script that I would not have written, but it is another testimony of God's perfect plan.

As it turns out, one young boy prayed the blessing before the meal. That's really amazing. Back in March the boys did not open up much, and never would have prayed in front of each other. This young boy has prayed at our chapel services recently, and on one occasion he was made fun of because he stuttered so much. But here he is at a Thanksgiving banquet in front of over 200 people praying from his heart. That's what grace is all about...Jesus doing the impossible through you...Jesus shining through you!

It doesn't take a theologian to know God and to express the life of Christ...it takes humility. Jesus said in Matthew 18:4, *Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me.*

Following is my Thanksgiving testimony read at the banquet by the director of the Boys Home. I hope it ministers to you, too, of the miraculous truth of how valuable you are to God.

A Thanksgiving Testimony

by Gregg Gibbons

The Experiencing God team is so thankful for the opportunity to share truth and hope with the boys each Tuesday evening since March. Most of all we are thankful for each and every boy. We have activities and refreshments and study the Bible and just talk to the boys. For several months we have been reading through the Gospel of John with the boys. The boys read and discuss the verses out loud. It's amazing to witness the boys seek to know truth in this way.

As we think about this Thanksgiving dinner tonight, also think about the Gospel of John chapter 6 verses 5 through 14 about Jesus and His disciples encountering over 5000 hungry people. If we were to knock out that side of this gym and extend the gym all the way to the horse barn, and then fill this enlarged gym with people, there would be 5000 hungry people!

The miracle of this story centers around a little boy...a boy not unlike any boy here at the Boys Home...a little boy hardly even noticed. This boy came up to Jesus with five loaves of bread and two small fish...not much at all...and surely not enough to feed all 5000 people.

But Jesus did two things.

First, Jesus said to the disciples to make the people sit down...just like all of us here tonight. Think about this. When we sit down, we rest. Jesus wants people to rest from their own attempts to work out the circumstances of life. Jesus wants people to trust His provisions for their every need. That's what we can be thankful for, a God who provides when we sit down and rest and watch Him work out His love in our lives, particularly in the lives of these precious boys. Tonight, we can sit down and rest and be thankful for this bountiful meal to share from His hands.

Second, Jesus took the loaves of bread and the fish from the little boy. Now here's the miracle: *the little boy humbly gave Jesus the bread and fish.* What's the miracle you say? To human eyes, the boy did not have much at all...BUT...when the little boy entrusted what he did have into the hands of Jesus, Jesus fed the entire 5000 people!

This is the miracle of the Boys Home for which we are so thankful. Young boys willing to learn how to take all that they have, which with human eyes may not look like much, and learning to watch God bless other people through their lives. Yes, this is the miracle of the Boys Home...boys learning that they are loved and are immensely valuable. And for this miraculous truth we are so thankful.

Merry Christmas!!!