

Radioactive

when science, medicine, and prayer mix



**A captivating fusion of drama, humor,
and spiritual insight**

BACK COVER

Rebellious, unmotivated, and academically challenged, Merlin had little hope for success in life. Never did he, nor anyone else, imagine how God would miraculously lead him to become a medical physicist as a stepping stone to fulfill a higher calling of ministering to, and praying with, the patients under his care.

“Radioactive” gives new meaning to the terms fission, fusion, and atomic meltdown. You better hang on for the ride. There are mountains, valleys, and interesting detours along the way.

My career guidance counselor informed me that my ACT score in math was 6 and the national average was 18. With a look of sympathy in his eyes, he said, “Merlin, you may want to consider... a hands-on type career.”

“Me, become a physicist? You must be Nuts!”
I thought, *“He doesn’t know my math and science background, and I can’t even spell it!”*

In no uncertain terms I said, “I am not going to lie to you nor deny my Lord. If you hire me, here is what you get...I will share my faith with the patients at any opportunity and, if they show a desire, I will pray with them.”

Radioactive!

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PREFACE

Over the years, I have been blessed with many opportunities to verbally share how God has led in my life. I have always had the conviction that one day I would be led to write the story. Several times, over the past twenty-five years, I have sat in front of my computer with the intention of pursuing this goal, only to experience writer's block. After staring at a blank screen for a while, I would conclude that the time wasn't right. A couple months ago I read a book about a physician who was led by the Lord down a path similar to mine and it inspired me to try again. Evidently, this was the right timing because when I sat down to write, it flowed.

I prayed earnestly for wisdom to know how to share my story with you. My greatest fear was that I would uplift myself instead of Christ. May He, and He only, receive the glory due to His name. I deserve and accept full responsibility for the foolishness. Only a limited amount of that foolishness has been shared to keep from glorifying the devil. My sincere prayer is that you may be encouraged in your journey of faith and find a friend in Jesus. He is the only Source for a life of true happiness.

This account highlights the miraculous events of my graduate school experience and what led me to that point, my family, and the interesting path of my career since. These experiences happened with real people. To protect their confidentiality, names and identifying details have been changed. And, though I have found some humor in a few of them, the events have been represented the best I can recall to the actual occurrences.

My Official Disclaimer

Though I could give you many disclaimers, here are just two of them. First, as you will soon discover, I have had numerous life-threatening concussions. Because of this the frontal lobe of my challenged brain has been the unfortunate recipient of extreme trauma. At times, more frequently than I would like to acknowledge, its function is questionable. If you need a witness just ask my wife!

My second disclaimer is that the half-life of the memory of the small, age dwindling, 2.5-pound mass located between my ears is short, and the years are many. Therefore, the memory decay could affect my recollection of some of the details.

To be true to my profession, I have used some radiation physics descriptors in different titles and tied into that theme. I promise not to torture you with any in-depth, physics lectures. I have endured enough of that trauma to last us all a lifetime! That's my promise and I'm sticking to it!

If you know me and find yourself involved in the story; and, if from your perspective, you have been unjustly represented, get over it! Just kidding! The constitution of this great country gives the freedom of speech; therefore, I will too. To verbally defend your honor (remember duels to the death are no longer fashionable), my contact information is in this book. Unless you are extremely disgruntled and have a history of violent behavior, it would be great to reconnect with you and reminisce about the details! But, it is my story from my perspective and, more than likely, I'm sticking to it!

Concussions, Contusions and Interesting Conclusions - 1

Life is full of choices and on that stormy summer day, as my motorcycle and I sped along a rain glazed road, I had three. Option one, by default smash into the metal bumper of the car that was backing out of a driveway in front of me. Option two, slam into four mailboxes set in concrete on the side of the road. Option three, hit the four-foot ditch and be catapulted through a four-strand barbed wire fence. Now, as I recall this incident forty years later, I am still not sure what the best option was, but I opted for the steel bumper. Though the time for my decision making seemed like microseconds, the sound of crunching metal, my trip into that ditch, and the howling chain of the bike on top of me, all seemed to go in slow motion. My home was the next driveway down, so it was convenient that my nineteen-year-old brother and his friend could watch my accident from our living room picture window. This first scene of this progressing nightmare finally ended when the

two of them sprinted to my rescue and pulled the roaring motorcycle off my bleeding body.

Now scene two was about to begin, but this one was not in slow motion. With eyes as big as Texas, and panic in his voice, my brother said to his friend, "We better get him to the hospital!" I thought my life was in danger up to this point, but I had no clue what was in store. My brother's friend, also wide eyed, ran for his car. Retrospectively, I am not sure if his eyes were big because of the sight of my leg, filleted open to the bone, or for this legitimate opportunity to test the strength of his muscle car. Before I could ascertain the reality of this dilemma, I found myself stretched across the back seat of his 360-horse power, V8, four-barrel, 1974 Dodge Challenger with my gapping leg draped across my brother's lap.

Trust me, things were no longer moving in slow motion! We performed amazing, high-speed drifts around the corners of the country road with moves that would have impressed an Indy 500 champion! We then boldly made our way onto Highway 59 northbound. With a five-mile straight stretch of road ahead of us, we neared what seemed like the speed of sound. In reality, it was probably about 130 mph. Maybe it was my fourteen-year-old imagination that played tricks on me, but I believe the usual twenty-minute trip to town took five minutes.

As the roar of the turbo charged engine and customized muffler system reminded me of my ongoing nightmare, I made a feeble attempt to evaluate the situation. I asked my wide-eyed brother, "Do you think I will need stiches?" Then came the infamous last words, "No, it's not that bad." The grand finale of scene two was the screeching tires as we drifted around the last corner into the emergency room parking lot. I am not sure if I was more relieved to get to the hospital and receive my many stiches or to exit this improvised ambulance.

My parent's "quiet weekend" at their cabin on the lake soon ended with a phone call. They were informed that their youngest son was in route to the emergency room of the local hospital. With the seriousness of my condition unknown, adrenaline rushing, and my father driving, my mother also experienced an exhilarating trip to the hospital. Unfortunately for her, it was a sixty-mile trip. By the grace of the Lord, they made it safely!

Incidentally, when the car bumper struck the right side of my bike it broke the front shock. Hidden by a rubber cover, this went undetected until a week later when scene three of this action-packed nightmare would occur. The friend behind me, also on a motorcycle, witnessed this unfortunate event. He said that I was traveling about fifty-five mph when my front wheel encountered a large pot hole. After impact, the broken shock was stuck in the compressed position and catapulted me over the handle bars in a fashion that would have made Superman proud. Unfortunately, I was not wearing his protective suit. I was wearing short pants, a tank top, and still donning my recently acquired stitches from the week before. My unplanned air travel ended with me landing on my head and left shoulder. I rolled once and then slid approximately sixty feet on the asphalt. Much to my dismay, I soon experienced a heavy case of what bike riders commonly refer to as “road rash.”

While sliding along on my knees, wrist, and right arm, an oncoming van, conveniently populated with long-time family friends, narrowly missed running over me. They slowed and returned to the accident scene in time to see me stand to my feet. They asked, “Merlin, Are you okay?” I said, “Yes” and then collapsed to the ground. The concussion I just acquired from my heads interaction with the pavement, combined with my previously questionable brain function, negatively influenced my ability to accurately evaluate my condition.

I am glad to report that I was unconscious through most of the ordeal. Still to this day, the only thing I remember related to the initial event was being on a road about a mile before the accident occurred. I choose to believe that God was sparing me the trauma of another high-speed trip to the hospital. Although I doubt that the “ambulance” of choice this day—a van, had as much muscle to flex as did the Dodge Challenger.

I have only limited recollection of this emergency room visit because I was fading in and out of consciousness. I do vaguely remember three things: First, hearing the X-ray technologist say, “His collar bone is broken.” Second, waking up momentarily as I felt the doctor removing peas size gravel from various parts of my anatomy. Third, a couple hours later, with first aid complete and being held

together by an assortment of stitches and bandages, I remember being wheeled to the car and heading home.

Much to my relief, and my mother's peace of mind, the trip was relatively normal. Oh, I forgot to mention that my parents were at the cabin again when they received this call. Thanks to me, I think they gave up on "quiet weekends" at the lake! While sharing my recollection of this incident with my sister, she claims that, while in the emergency room, I kept repeating, "I knew I should have gone to church today!", but I deny all such accusations!

The initial incident with the car happened a day before my 8th grade graduation, but all was not lost. God blessed me with the ability to hobble down the aisle on crutches to receive my diploma, and Teresa—the girl of my dreams was at my side. What more could a guy ask for? The superman impersonation over the handle bars happened the next weekend. It probably goes without saying that this was not the best summer of my childhood. I spent many weeks in bed sticking to my bandages and bed sheets. The "road rash" skin that covered approximately 60% of my body wept along with me. Despite all that happened, God is good! My life was miraculously spared! Eventually the asphalt burns healed, my broken bones mended, and my wounded pride recovered. Since then I have a new appreciation for something called a helmet, and for my parent's wisdom in insisting that I wear it. If I hadn't been wearing one, I would not be telling you this story.

I look and back and realize and regret the stress I put my guardian angel and my dear parents through. I will spare you all the gory details, but will mention a few of many more incidents that occurred during my accident-prone childhood and teen years. I was in a head-on car accident, while not wearing a seat belt. I now have a new level of respect for seatbelts. I was run over by a two-ton truck causing more road rash and the need for gravel removal from various parts of my anatomy again. I was in multiple serious bicycle accidents requiring slings, stitches and more gravel removal. And last, but certainly not least, various times of needing stitches, having pulled muscles, dislocation of bones, and the breaking of my nose three times. Most of these issues resulted from the pursuit of my passion for waterskiing.

The amazing thing is that, by the grace of God, I am alive to tell the story, and for this I am eternally grateful. I know that the daily intercessory prayers of two very important women in my life—my mother and grandmother, were instrumental in God’s ability to intervene in their behalf for my survival. God loved me, and He had a plan for my life. A future and a hope that I have experienced, but certainly not because I deserve it. Unfortunately, at that stage in my life I was not oblivious to His blessings, it would be a few more years in the future before I would choose to follow His patient leading.

My friend, God has an indescribable love for each one of His earthly children. He loves you as deeply and as passionately as if you were His only child (Psalm 33:13-15). You are not an accident; He planned your birth and carefully penned your days in His book (Psalm 139:16). He desires to give you the future and hope that you long for (Jeremiah 29:11). He will not force His will upon you, but when you allow Him to, He will be your sun and shield and also give you His amazing grace (Psalm 84:11, 12).

My Water Skiing Obsession - 2

My parents struggled to keep their sanity because I was so accident prone. They also desperately sought reprieve from the stress by trying to spend “quiet weekends” on the lake, but to no avail. Now, retrospectively, I believe if you were a fly on their wall you would have heard this strategy being discussed between them, “We won’t have any peace unless we take Merlin and his friends to the lake with us.” This achieved the goal of keeping me from motorcycle accidents, at least on the weekends. This also proved to be a great blessing in the strengthening of our family unit. When other parents were at home wondering where their teenagers were, they were probably at the lake with our family. I am proud to have carried on this legacy in my family. Over all the many years of raising our children, our time on the lake has been a source of great blessings and countless memories.

For the sake of the case in point, let me regress for a moment to share some history. When I was about eight years old my parents left on a get-a-way weekend for their anniversary. My eleven-year-old sister and I were left in the care of my thirteen-year-old brother. This begs the question, “What were they thinking!?” But at this point, at least from

the “Merlin on a motor bike” perspective, they were relatively safe. I only had a mini-bike with a five-horsepower lawn mower engine mounted on its little orange frame; and I was only allowed to ride it on our property or to a friend’s house a few blocks down the road.

To my parent’s delight, there were not any emergency phone calls that weekend. They returned and entered the drive way pulling a boat that greatly resembled the Batmobile. This masterpiece was about thirty years old and proudly touted a thirty-five horsepower Evinrude motor clamped on the back. The boats oxidized, red, stress cracked surface told the tale of a hard life. But, what do you expect for \$300 dollars, right? And besides my father was not one to go into debt. If he were still alive today, I would gladly thank him for ingraining this important principle in me that has since been a blessing. Although retrospectively, in this case, debt may have been a better option.

What is a “new ski boat” without skis? After a quick trip to the Salvation Army, for \$5.00, we became the proud owners of a pair of not so “state of the art” fiberglass skis. Either, due to age, wear, or a manufacturing flaw, these skis gave new meaning to the term “fiberglass.” If you have ever worked with insulation, you know how the fibers can enter and irritate your skin. It was no different after a session of attempted skiing with these babies! Oh, and for those of you who have experienced the sport of water skiing you might recall that it is normally embedded in the manufactured DNA of skis to know how to float, not so with these masterpieces. They would hover at a depth of about 6 inches beneath the surface, I suspect, kept partially afloat by the bindings and the wood rudder.

It would be unfair if I did not mention the “state of the art” life preservers we also acquired at the Salvation Army. You are probably familiar with the type, after putting it around your neck and synching it to your waist you feel like you just stuck your head into an orange guillotine. And, upon high speed contact with the water, you feel like you have experienced one!

Thus began our countless weekends on the lake. The first summer was a blur, probably due to dizziness caused by the endless circles made trying to get me and my sister up on skis. No one had a clue where to start. We had heard the term “Hit it” so this became a

regular part of our vocabulary. The drivers, my brother and dad, didn't always see the wisdom in taking the slack out of the rope first. As a result, you would hear the acceleration of our, not so blazing, thirty-five horsepower motor followed by the thump of the handle that had just been ripped out of our hands and had hit our prized skis. There is one thing that I would have to credit the manufacture of those skis with, and that is that they could take a real beating without any apparent damage!

In the occasional event that the line was tight when "Hit it" was yelled, there was one other phrase that I would occasionally hear, "I would let go after the skis are behind you or you might drown." Lack of determination was not a missing ingredient to my success. Finally, one fateful day at the end of that first summer my sister was the first to stand to her feet on our prized skis and navigate about a hundred feet across the murky surface. Not to be out done, by the end of that day, I could say that I had finally water skied as well. A new passion was born within me. Unfortunately, it would become my god above all else. I am so thankful that the God of Creation was, and still is, so longsuffering and patient with me.

Eventually I realized our, not so "state of the art", skis needed an upgrade. And, just as importantly, my parents figured out their boat needed one too! Their children were spending far too much time underwater between the time of hearing "Hit it" and when they were finally in the skiing position. This led them to multiple boat upgrades over the years, for which I was very grateful.

It wasn't long before boredom set in and I began looking for new avenues to grow my new-found passion. Just when my dad thought the days of going in circles to get me up had ended, little did he realize they had just begun? This boredom with two skis led to the pursuit of the arts of slalom and trick skiing. Before long open water slalom skiing and basic trick skiing became mundane. The next logical pursuit became barefoot skiing. This challenge was successful at keeping most of my attention for a couple of years, then one day we came across a slalom course. I am sure the owners did not appreciate our limited ability to use and maintain their course, but that didn't stop us. This became a regular part of our weekend routine. Now, with goals to set and

personal best performances to break, this revived my passion for slalom.

Time passed and a couple of years later, when I was about fifteen years old, I heard about a water ski tournament coming up in a few weeks on a nearby lake. All my life I have been self-conscious of doing anything in front of people. No, let me rephrase that, was TERRIFIED of doing anything in front of people. Despite this mental handicap, I felt driven to ski in this tournament.

The day came, the whole family climbed into the van, and we headed to the tournament. I entered the slalom division for my age group and the open division barefoot competition. My turn to compete finally came and amazingly enough, with a fountain of adrenaline flowing, I was able to stand to my feet and ski. Much to my surprise and the surprise of my cheering section—my family, I left the tournament that day as champion of both divisions. I don't want to leave you with the impression that I was a great skier. I am sure that the rest of the pack were, if possible, either more of a novice or more nervous than I was.

If the passion I had felt for the sport before was like a firecracker, now it was of the magnitude of a nuclear explosion. Through high school, college and into the first few years of marriage I would eat, sleep, and breathe to water ski. This would cause an endless and expensive cycle of trips to Florida ski schools, evening practice sessions, and traveling to tournaments around the region on weekends.

Soon after high school I attended a junior college to become an X-ray technologist. I worked eight hours for required clinical experience for my degree. I would then punch out and immediately clock back in on another time-card to work the eight-hour evening shift as a student technologist. The motivation of the hospital was my cheap labor, my motivation was to own a boat. After two years, my dream came true with the purchase of an older Mastercraft. This evening employment also provided the money to pursue my passion for tournament skiing on the weekends.

There were positive and negative aspects to my passion. Some of the benefits were that it kept me out of potential trouble, and physically fit. It is noteworthy that the attractive young ladies in bikinis

were certainly not a deterrent to motivation! Unfortunately, there were negative effects that also resulted. The first and most critical was the fact that my priorities were out of order. With waterskiing on the throne of my heart, my walk with the Lord faded as this passion for the sport consumed me.

Note that earlier I said, I would “eat, sleep, and breathe to waterski” take note that you didn’t hear the word “study” mentioned in that list. When I wasn’t on the lake, my obsession with watching tournaments, reading water skiing magazines, and training left little time for study. This issue would eventually come back to haunt me; but that story is for a future chapter to tell.

The Lord is so patient! Even though I was pursuing my own selfish ambitions and irreverently walking on His Holy Sabbath day, Christ never left me. I recall one incident that left a permanent impression on my mind. At the age of seventeen, I heard a true story about a young man who put his faith and love for God above waterskiing. This young man was competing in a major tournament. As the tournament progressed, he placed very highly in the first two events. To win the prestigious overall championship title, all he had to do was to enter the third event. This was scheduled for Saturday morning conflicting with the Lord’s Day of worship. By just riding his ski to a standing position he could take home the gold. Unlike me, he had put God on the throne of his life instead of water skiing. He kept his priorities in order, attended church, and obeyed God’s commands, and in doing so he forfeited the overall champion title. He was so in love with Christ that he gladly demonstrated this by keeping God’s fourth commandment. Many would call this legalism, but God calls it love (John 14:21; 15:10). This provided a lot of media attention and gave him the opportunity to share his faith-filled testimony.

At the time this boggled my mind and made a permanent impression that would forever influence my life. It amazed me that young man made, what I viewed as, an extreme sacrifice for Christ; but, he was honoring the supreme sacrifice Christ made for him. If he would have skied that day, he would have earned my admiration for a few minutes by standing on the victory podium holding a gold medal. Instead he has my admiration, and more importantly the Lord’s, for a

life-time. Though, at the time, it did not alter my ways, it certainly altered my thoughts and would one day impact my life.

Now let us fast forward to the future. I had spent several years competing, even when married and with small children. I remember my oldest being three days old in a carrier located beneath the steering wheel. She slept soundly to the hum of the motor while my faithful wife pulled me through the slalom course. Gradually my patient and loving Lord helped me get my priorities in order. Finally, the day of putting God on the throne of my life above water skiing came.

I still loved the sport, and at times for a few more years competed, but it no longer was the center of my life. When there was not a conflict with honoring God and my family, in a much more relaxed state of mind, I would occasionally compete. The way most water ski tournaments work is that you ski two rounds--one Saturday and one Sunday, and the judges take the highest round as your final score. To honor the Lord's Day (Mark 2:28), I would skip the Saturday round and only ski Sunday. After making this decision to put Christ first, I skied better and won more tournaments than when I would ski both rounds. To Him be the glory! More importantly, it opened opportunities for me to share my testimony of what Christ is to me. For instance, it was not infrequent, that in our ski clubs local single round competitions, they would change the day of the tournament so I could participate. I never requested this, the decision was made by the club officials who respected my convictions.

At the final tournament of my competitive career, with the Lord's blessing, I skied my personal best which qualified me for nationals--my career goal. God honors those who honor Him (1 Samuel 2:30)! Christ says that if we seek His kingdom first in our lives, other good things will be given to us (Matthew 6:33). Once we realize that His plans are greater than ours and trust Him, He will bless!

When someone or something reigns supreme in our life over Christ, it is a setup for a perfect storm--an emotional roller coaster. With me my obsession with waterskiing and the adrenaline of competition caused me to be on an emotional high one week, proud to be bringing home the trophy. Then, the next week, I would be severely depressed from driving hours and spending a couple hundred dollars just to fall on

my face. My self-worth was dependent on my performance, not on the price paid by Christ on Calvary for me.

When fame, fortune, other people, sports, or anything else takes priority in your life, an emotional roller coaster and disaster will eventually be the result. But when we realize that Christ paid such a high price for us, it gives us a self-worth that cannot be shaken. He is an ever-present friend that will never leave nor forsake us and offers us a future and hope that is out of this world!

Production, Exhaustion, and Motivation Induction- 3

It was a typical fall evening around 9 pm at the Christian High school I attended. I slowed down to a stop on the road located about one hundred yards from the backside of the girl's dormitory. The windows of my green Camaro, complete with a state-of-the-art stereo, went down and the music went up. The song of choice for this mini-concert, I am embarrassed to say, was "Running with the Devil" by Van Halen. I did not realize at the time the reality of the truth I was proclaiming with my music.

The choices available for the young resident women were either to continue with study hall, or to hear a song or two of their favorite, forbidden music. I quickly become very popular and received the attention for which I was searching. The dorm windows would go up, the mini-concert would follow. Then, at times, the girl's dean would jump in her little pickup and the chase would begin. Camaro verses a Toyota pickup, at the time I questioned her thinking. Although after raising three beautiful daughters, I now understand her protective instinct that would cause her to try anyway. This was a frequent occurrence that continued from my sophomore year until my senior year.

Finally, the dean gave up the chase and took a different approach. She reported me to Ad Counsel (Administrative Counsel). For those who are not familiar with that term it means the names and offenses of the accused are discussed in great length before the school authorities. Then, if found guilty, you are called on the red carpet before

the disciplinary committee to receive your sentence followed by the enforcement of unpleasant consequences.

God has a way of bringing positive influences into your life at the right time. At the beginning of my senior year, the school was blessed with a teacher just out of college who taught Bible class and served as the career counselor. Though he was an unlikely companion to the rebellious teenager that I was, we had some things important to me in common. We both enjoyed water skiing, tennis, and high tech stereo systems. It probably goes without saying that he made much better choices in the selection of his music than I did though.

We eventually connected, became good friends, and he became an important influence in my life. When my name came up in Ad Counsel over the issue of “concerts behind the girl’s dorm,” he came to my rescue. He asked for a chance to talk with me before they resorted to inviting me on the red carpet. We had “the talk” and, out of respect for him, I refrained from my wayward actions and ended my DJ career.

As I reflect on the years I attended this school, I really don’t know why the faculty kept me around considering my appearance, my offensive music, and the crowd that I spent my time with. I am sure they were totally convinced that I was one of the biggest drug addicts, alcoholics, and marijuana smokers in town. After all, I certainly wasn’t avoiding the appearance of evil, and I was a lived off campus and had access to all these things. Unfortunately, most of the friends that I spent my time with did fit into those categories.

Never underestimate the power of intercessory prayer or the Holy Spirit working in behalf of your wayward family members! I praise God for a mother and grandmother that were relentless in their intercessory prayers for me. I wish I could say I stood strong in all areas, but I can say that by the grace of God, I never drank alcohol, smoked tobacco, or put marijuana to my lips. If I were a betting man, I would wager that a bus load of Harvard’s and Yale’s best lawyers would not have been able to convince the Ad Counsel of this fact.

I was raised in a semi-Christian home. My mother loved and followed Christ, my father did not. In fact, he put forth much effort to belittle the church and my mom for her efforts to raise her children as Christians. I was blessed to have a wonderful Christian grandmother

who prayed daily for me and, financially, made it possible for me to attend a Christian elementary and high school. Looking back, I can see the huge positive impact this school had in my life; though at that time I did not see the wisdom in attending a private school. Luckily, my weekend passion for water skiing outweighed my drive for competing in traditional sports at the local public school. If this were not the case, my desire to attend public school would have been much greater.

Though, at the age of thirteen, I followed my girlfriend's example and went into the waters of baptism. Unfortunately, it was a short-lived conviction. My life was a blur of sports, fast cars, and girl chasing. This, combined with the negative influence of older friends and the freedom given to me to run the streets, took its toll on my spiritual life.

There was another important experience that took place while attending this school that would ultimately shape my future. To help with the tuition expenses, the school had setup a work-study program. This meant that, depending on the grade you were in, you would spend the morning or afternoon attending classes, and the opposite part of the day working on the school grounds or in an industry. We were also encouraged to work full-time during the summer to aid in the payment of our educational expenses.

At the age of sixteen, I worked at a kitchen cabinet factory located about a half mile from campus. The operation was in a huge metal building complete with fans blowing the hot summer air in our faces. My job was on the cabinet assembly line. This was a two-hundred-foot-long, four-foot wide belt that carried the cabinet frames rapidly along as each member of the team performed their tasks. Some of these tasks included: screwing the face frames together, stapling on various parts, puttying, sanding, hanging doors, and inserting corner blocks. My task was using a high-speed disk sander to prepare the face frame to receive the appropriate paint or varnish.

One hot, humid, one hundred-degree summer day, which seemed even worse inside, my motivation for a different career path was ignited. During a rare break between the cabinets on which I was feverishly working, and with sweat dripping from my brow, the great awakening came. I looked down the assembly line and around the

building and I observed not only students, but also many others from my age to retirement age, working with the same intensity and in the same scorching environment. For the first time in my life, the encouragement from my parents to pursue a higher education seemed wise. I will confess that, due to several factors, the thought of pursuing a college education produced a lot of anxiety in my, not so well developed, frontal lobe.

Unfortunately, this moment of inspiration came many years too late for adequate preparation for college. Throughout my high school years, I did all within my teenage power to avoid math, science, or any other class that I believed would distract me from the priorities in my life. These priorities were waterskiing, music, sports cars, and the pursuit of young women; and not necessarily in that order.

I believe the main contributor to my lack of brain power was caused by my accident-proneness during my teen years. I recently heard from a credible physician that if you have experienced two or more concussions during your lifetime, it can impact the function of the frontal lobe. My (not so expert) opinion is that my numerous concussions contributed highly to my academic challenges. This is my excuse and I am sticking with it!

It wasn't long before my new-found motivation took me to the office of my friend--the career counselor. He sat me down in his office and informed me that I needed to take a college entrance exam called the ACT test. Luckily, or maybe not so luckily, the opportunity to take this test was fast approaching. I optimistically took the exam and a short time later he called me back into his office to give me the results. He informed me that my score was six in math. I was impressed until he proceeded to inform me that the national average was eighteen. After that news, I was relatively excited to hear the news that my composite score was fifteen. With a look of sympathy in his eyes, he pointed me to a bookshelf full of notebooks and said, "Merlin, you may want to consider a less academic and a more hands-on type career."

Determined not to be derailed from my new-found ambition, I optimistically began my career search. I knew I didn't want to make a career out of college for obvious academic reasons. After much deliberation, I decided that something "hands on" but still from a

college was a good compromise; so I choose to take a two-year course to become an X-ray Technologist. Why the college let me in with my poor ACT scores, to this day I do not know, but they did. I then had the privilege of taking several “remedial” courses. This is a politically correct way of saying, “Since you didn’t study in high school and flunked your ACT test, you’re going to have to retake those classes here in college.” By a decided change in study habits and with God’s blessing, I survived the X-ray program with decent grades.

During the X-ray program, they had us do two-week rotations in other areas of the field. This is where I was introduced to the profession of radiation therapy. This built upon the course I had just completed and was only another year in length. Though I was not excited about more study, I really liked the idea of making more money, and not working nights, evenings or weekends. Before long I had applied for entrance into the school and was accepted. After taking these two courses of study and combining them, I was not far from completing a Bachelor’s degree. I knew that having this it would potentially open doors later in the event I decided to advance in my career. I found a program that would accept all the credits I had taken at numerous schools. With one semester of basic classes that I could take at any accredited college, and then by taking my last ten classes through that school, I would have a Bachelor’s in Radiological Science.

Meanwhile, through my college years my passion for waterskiing grew exponentially. I worked full-time on the evening shift to be able to purchase a Master Craft, the competition ski boat of my dreams. Maybe I should rephrase that. The Master Craft of my dreams was a brand-new model, but I was still thrilled to settle for one about five years old. And trust me, everyone on the lake knew when I was on the water. It was extremely bright yellow with a glittering blue stripe of stars. Not my first choice, but I got a great deal so who was I to be picky about color!

An experience during this time revealed another instance of God’s intervention to keep me alive. One Friday afternoon, my skiing obsessed roommate and I decided to travel to the other side of the city to check out a new ski shop. We jumped into my 1979 silver Camaro and took the belt way around the city. We were cruising along at about sixty-five miles per hour in the middle lane and minding our own

business. The topic of discussion was water skiing, of course. The driver of an eighteen-wheeler traveling to the rear and left side of us looked down at a map. Seconds later his right front tire hit the rear quarter panel of our car and the next thing we knew we were wildly swerving across three lanes of traffic.

The first miracle was the fact that we did not end up as twin pancakes under his truck. The second was that, after catapulting us across his lane and into the next lane over we missed numerous other automobiles by inches. And the third was to be able to navigate through all of this to a safe stop along the side of this busy six-lane highway. If you, like the police officer writing the report, were to question the validity of our experience, all you would have to do is look at the circular pattern left by his lug nuts on my quarter panel. Both the police officer and the owner of the trucking company, who also arrived promptly on the scene, were amazed we were still alive.

All I could think of was getting my car repaired. The trucking company owner was very quick to write a check and have us both sign a liability release. He realized more than we did how he just missed getting coverage on the 6 pm news about fatalities caused by his company. The kind of coverage no one wants and certainly the kind my roommate and I didn't want! It didn't really register at the time the significance of how God had intervened to spare our lives.

For several years, my life was a mix of hard work and study through the week, and then ski tournaments and dating on the weekends. Unfortunately, my spiritual life had not taken root and grown stronger. But, God IS love and the very definition of it, and He hadn't left me though I wasn't seeking Him. Little did I know that He would soon bring me the woman of my dreams. The power of my mother's prayers continued to be critical and effective in shaping my life.

Magnetic Attraction, Radioactive Dating and Life Fusion - 4

"That sounds awesome! I'll take it!" These words quickly tumbled from my mouth. I had just been offered the job of my dreams for the upcoming summer. I would be a full-time boat driver and water

ski instructor with the freedom to ski anytime I wasn't driving or teaching the guests. I had accompanied my girlfriend and her grandmother on a 12-hour trip to an amazing resort where her grandmother would be interviewing for a job. As we entered the beautiful mountainous setting of the retreat, I knew we had arrived in paradise. My well-trained eyes spotted the glassy smooth water, a slalom course, and two competition boats on the private lake. Unfortunately, my greatest passion would not be indulged that weekend. The icy winter water and the lack of a willing driver prevented, what I am sure would have been, an exhilarating experience.

Grandma had her interview as planned and was offered the job as the lead cook for the following summer. Over the course of the weekend, I had connected with the resort manager who also had a passion for skiing. Before we left for home I was given an invitation for summer employment that I readily accepted.

The summer was awesome! I met a soulmate who became my roommate. He was the instructor for the other boat. It was a dream come true for both of us. We would go out early in the morning before classes began and after they had finished. We would have the private lake all to ourselves to practice our passion on the glassy smooth water. The experience lived up to my expectation, but the summer passed by far too quickly and soon it was time to get back to the reality of finishing college.

To finish my degree, I needed one semester of basic requirements and then I planned to enroll in a modular course at a distant university to finish my degree. At this point in my life I was twenty-three and had attended numerous colleges and universities. This had presented many opportunities for dating, but I had not let myself get involved in any serious relationships. The Lord has made a promise in His Word, that if you train a child in the right direction when he is older he will not depart from it (Proverbs 22:6). I had been taught according to Scripture that it is not wise to be unequally yoked with a non-believer because darkness cannot mix with light (2 Corinthians 6:14); or even with someone of dissimilar beliefs. Though I was not actively pursuing spiritual growth, I did know that someday I would want to be joined in marriage with someone who had the same fundamental beliefs.

During my summer of water skiing bliss, I met several college students who were working at the retreat. They were earning money for the next year's tuition at a nearby Christian university. Since this school operated on the same belief system that I was raised with, I decided this would be a great place to spend the one semester I had left to take on campus classes. My thoughts were, "Okay Lord, if she is here please bring her into my life." During the first day of world history class I spotted a cute, blue-eyed blonde named Vonda that would soon steal my heart, and the rest is our history (a little pun never hurt anyone!).

She didn't have a clue that I existed, but I certainly knew that she did. That evening while in the bookstore purchasing my text book, my heart skipped a few beats when I saw her enter the checkout line. Not willing to miss this prime opportunity to introduce myself, I quickly took the spot in line behind her. Our World History class small talk soon turned into deeper discussions about meaningful matters.

Over the next week, we met to study "history" in the administration building. You can imagine my excitement when our conversations turned to water activities and she shared that she was an avid water skier. You can imagine the gleam in her eyes when I happened to mention that I had a Master Craft competition ski boat and that we should go skiing some time. For the next couple of weeks we spent more and more time together at meals, on the phone, and "studying" in the administration building.

In my estimation, the time had come for an official date. Soon our conversations turned to the coming weekend. I invited her to a concert that would be held in the large church on campus by a well-known gospel singing group. She readily accepted the invitation. She liked this group for years and confessed that she really would love to sing as part of their group. Little did I realize that she had the talent for that dream to become a possible reality.

The greatly anticipated day finally arrived. The plan was for us to meet in the lobby of the women's dormitory, and then walk the few blocks to the church. I showed up on time, but she didn't. I found out that she had gone to town but, according to her roommate, "She should be back any second." The seconds turned to minutes and the minutes into an hour. After finally deciding to go home and nurse my wounded

pride, I was heading for the door when she walked in. She soon explained that she had been in town selling her blood for some much-needed cash.

She and some friends had decided to make a “quick” trip to the blood plasma center—a place frequented by many hungry college students. They would pay \$20 dollars for a couple of hours of your time and the chance to drain a valuable substance from your blood. It had taken longer than expected and she didn’t make it back in time for our planned meeting. It didn’t take long for me to find it in my heart to forgive her and we quickly headed for the concert.

The concert was great, and much too short in my humble opinion! Before dismissing the audience, the director of the group announced that the floor was open to anyone who would like to audition for a soprano position in their group. Vonda’s roommate soon found us and applied intense pressure on her to try out for the part. Vonda had been a soloist and part of an elite choir group at her high school that had traveled on weekends to perform. Her roommate was aware of her talent and passion for music.

Vonda finally agreed under one condition...that I leave. I hesitantly agreed and headed towards the back door as Vonda went forward to sign up. Her roommate ran to the dorm to get a sound track for the audition. As I was about to exit the back door of the church, I noticed a staircase that led to the balcony. I began to justify my actions by the fact I had left, and she hadn’t said anything about my not returning! I soon found myself in the corner of the balcony waiting curiously to witness this girl, who I was falling in love with, sing.

Over the years, I had dated several girls who claimed to “sing” and were of average talent. I didn’t expect anything different with Vonda but, after all, it wasn’t her singing voice that had so greatly attracted me to her. I was not only overcome by her outward beauty but also her inward beauty of a sweet and gentle spirit.

The auditions began, and many aspiring vocalists took the stage and gave it their best shot. The director of the group was deep in conversation with friends and didn’t give any of them much of his attention. Then Vonda took the stage and she began to sing “Unfailing Love”—her favorite song and one she had often performed during their

choir tours. Immediately the director turned and gave his full attention for the remainder of the song. He then approached her, and after a few formalities, gave her a business card. He said that her voice was beautiful, and he would be in contact with her before long.

A few weeks passed and our attraction to one another grew stronger. In the meantime, Vonda had steady communications with the director of the music group. He requested that she record a few songs on a cassette tape at a little radio station on campus. For those who don't know what a cassette tape is, Google it! The purpose of the tape was to aid them in their selection process by a demonstration of her ability and range.

Another week or two passed and he contacted her with another request that was urgent. He said that his search had come down to her and one other young lady. He said he needed another tape in the next couple days and then he would be making his decision. I knew they had been communicating, but I didn't really know much of what was transpiring. I will attempt to relay Vonda's part of this story as I have heard it consistently over the years and she has stuck to it!

I was falling in love with Vonda, but I was set in my bachelor ways and hadn't given permanent commitment much thought. I was slow to comprehend the fact that Vonda "knew I was the one for her." By talking with a friend who was attending the same university and had travelled and performed with this music group in the past, she learned that she would be on the road eleven months out of the year. With our growing relationship not yet fully blossomed, her accepting a position with them now would likely result in it dwindling away. Right after receiving the news that she was in the final two and that her dream of singing with this group could really happen, the reality of the dilemma began to sink in for her.

That evening she went into the chapel of the girl's dorm in great distress. She never wanted any two things more in her life. She fell to her knees and pleaded for God to decide for her and left it in His hands. Vonda had never in her life experienced laryngitis. She woke up the next morning with a case so severe that she was unable to speak above a whisper. There was no possibility of making a recording to meet the deadline of the next day which he had given her. This was her

confirmation that one day we would be married. Though I was a few steps behind, it didn't take long for me to arrive at the same conclusion.

At the time, Vonda had wondered why the Lord didn't just let the other girl get the position without the laryngitis episode. Looking back, she realizes that if that would have happened, it would have shattered her already very fragile self-worth. She believes if that had happened she probably would never have pursued a music career. Little did she know that God would hear her prayer and give her both of her dreams! The first dream was of course to marry Me!☺ The second dream was to be fulfilled in the future. He would bless her with an amazing solo career as a Christian recording artist. She would travel internationally and have her music aired daily around the world on many Christian satellite networks and radio stations. God is amazing!

As a young teen, Vonda had randomly come across a religious broadcast. There was a godly speaker on the program who shared a message. After his message a white-haired lady, who Vonda greatly admired, would sing. Vonda would watch, listen, and daydream about one day doing the same thing. Little did she know that God was smiling down on her as He thought of His plan for her future. Fifteen years later her dream became a reality. The same lady retired as the vocalist and Vonda was hired to take her place. Vonda was privileged to spend the next ten years traveling with the Director and his wife giving concerts where he spoke and recorded music to be aired on their television series. Isn't our heavenly Father amazing! He loves us and wants to bless us with good gifts when we ask according to His will. And sometimes he gives good gifts that we want, but for which we don't know to ask, or maybe for which we don't have the courage to ask (Ephesians 3:20).

I finished that semester of basic requirements I lacked, then I took a job at the local hospital as a Radiation Therapist. I spent my evenings in the library with Vonda. She was studying for another semester at the same school, and I was taking the remainder of my classes by correspondence from an out-of-state university. We were engaged after about six months of dating and married six months later.

God knew what we both needed before we did. At that time in our lives, we were in the same spiritual state. God was patient with us

and knew that one day we would both grow the same direction towards Him. At that point in time we would occasionally attend church, that is, if there wasn't a ski tournament on the weekend. After all we had to keep our warped priorities straight! Even when our priorities were out of order, God was so patient and gently drew us to Him with cords of love! We are blessed to have recently celebrated our 31st wedding anniversary and our love for each other and marriage gets better every day! If we live to be a hundred, I am not sure my heart can handle it! God is good!

Fission of Family and Fusion to God - 5

I am sure Vonda would agree that June 14, 1988, was the longest day of our lives! It was approximately 8 p.m. and my lovely wife was soon to give birth to our first child, Aaron Scott Beerman, or so we thought! Our life had become a blur--trips to the baby doctor, Lamaze class (those of you who don't know what that is, Google it!), trips to the Mexican restaurant to fulfill her cravings, and the list goes on! But all of this was about to end, and we would start a new chapter in our lives as parents!

Vonda was in amazing shape, we had spent hours each evening at the gym. But instead of this effort helping, it seemed to be a curse. This was her first child and, due to her dedication in acquiring amazing muscle tone, this made her labor slow and painful. At least that's her story and she is sticking to it!

I will sneak in this tidbit of information and will likely suffer the consequences; but, I believe full disclosure is important! Vonda was a body builder for about a year just prior to getting pregnant and won 4th in state in her division. Now she is embarrassed about it, but it is a fact of life and she must face up to it! Don't worry she did not look like a muscle-bound man. She was in the lightweight women's division and looked very feminine and sexy, even if I must say so myself. I guess I had better end my thoughts there so that you who are parents don't have to stick your fingers in the ears of your listening children. After all this is a G-Rated book!

Back to the point, her labor went very slowly and painfully. Under oath, she would have to truthfully testify that I stood faithfully by

her side giving her, what I eventually found out was, unwanted advice. From my perspective, I was just doing my job with due diligence. Her job was to have the baby and mine was to coach her in the process. After all, I didn't attend Lamaze class every Thursday evening for months to fail at my job. When the painful contractions came, I would hold her hand and demonstrate the breathing techniques that I had so faithfully learned. My mild-mannered, sweet, and patient wife finally had enough. After a few hours she shared her thoughts with me and with great passion, "Just shut up and quit breathing in my face!" My heart was broken, but I took the hint. I am blessed to have never heard those devastating words since, not even when she gave birth to our next three children. Wow! She is one amazing woman! She was, and still is, the woman of my dreams!

Though we had chosen not to have an ultrasound to find out the sex of our coming child, the baby doctor gave his "almost never wrong" prediction that we would have a boy. Boy, was he wrong! Twenty-two hours later we became proud parents of Nichole (Nikki) Lynn Beerman. Before I even knew her weight, I was sent on a mission! Proudly wearing my huge "IT'S A GIRL" button, pinned to the expanded chest pocket of my scrub top, I entered a sandwich shop located next to the hospital. Shortly, with a foot-long veggie sub and large yogurt in hand, I hurried back to feed my starving wife and bond with my newborn daughter. Words cannot describe the joy and love that filled our hearts that day from this amazing blessing in our lives. And twenty-nine years later nothing has changed! Little did I realize that when her little hand squeezed my finger for the first time, she would have a strangle hold on my heart forever!

Don't take this wrong (especially you Nikki), she was, and still is, beautiful beyond description; but again, full disclosure is important. She came into this world with a cone-shaped, bald head. Based on her time of arrival and the interesting geometry of her head, evidence would suggest that next time the stork better remember his can of WD-40 or we should hire a different stork in the future.

In just a few days her head became perfectly symmetrical and later she grew beautiful blond hair. In the meantime, with the ingenuity and determination that only a new mother can possess, Vonda found ways to make sure that everyone knew she was a girl. It was amazing to

see what a frilly dress, a bow, and a glob of honey could accomplish. There was, however, one negative aspect to this strategy. Poor Nikki had to endure the endless attacks of flies that were attracted on her head.

As a child, Nikki was always such a blessing—very energetic, sweet, and compliant. One day she had a loose tooth that I was convinced should be forcefully removed. This begs the question, “Why?”, but for some reason I decided to document this event with the video camera. I should interject something important here. If you, by any chance, work for one of those government agencies that frown on this type of practice, you can skip the next few paragraphs.

Like a true dentist, I was dressed in work overalls, had the video camera rolling, and had pliers in hand ready to practice my dental skills. Full disclosure would reveal that I was just being too cheap to take her to a real dentist. I was lucky that she was too young to know the difference or to care.

With full trust in her daddy, innocent Nikki climbed up on the stool and sweetly asked, “Daddy, is this going to hurt?” I might add, she did climb up and submit to this procedure on her own accord and I have a video tape to prove it. Obviously, this was my first attempt as a parent to take on the role of a dentist. Otherwise, she probably wouldn’t have so willingly participated! Her question deserved an answer, so I convinced her “it will only be like a bee sting” and “the dollar you will get will make it worthwhile.” Well, she fell for it and we began the procedure. For the next five minutes my attempts at dentistry miserably failed. She would open wide her mouth, I would attempt to latch on to the slick tooth with my trusty pliers and yank away. Just for the record I said “trusty” not “rusty” pliers! Unfortunately, the tooth seemed very happy where it was located, and it was not cooperating. After numerous such attempts, I finally gave up.

I then began giving my wise, fatherly counsel for her to twist on it every chance she thought about it and eventually it would come out. Still sitting on her perch, she reached in her mouth, took hold of the tooth, pulled it out, and handed it to me.

It seems there is always a wiseguy in the bunch and she is the one in ours. Nikki went on through elementary, high school, and

university and never made below an A. I never thought that I would be begging my child to settle for a few “B’s”, but at times I did out of concern for her health. We, as parents, are proud that she learned to serve mankind as an RN, and accomplished this at one of the most highly respected and academically challenging nursing programs in the country.

Back to the subject of giving birth to children. I will share with you the story of the birth of our second child. It was a cool fall day—October 6, 1989, a day I remember well. Knowing that each experience with labor can be different, we were not sure what to expect. Just like our first experience, this day was one to remember.

The day began with shopping for a family car. For the past hour, we had been looking at a little brown Honda station wagon that we would eventually purchase. The day I never dreamed would come was here. We were at a used car lot about to trade in my Z-28 Camaro for a station wagon. Wow! The things we do for love! We were looking under the hood, well maybe it would be more truthful to say, I was. Vonda was scoping out the four-door option, imagining how much easier it would be to get our growing little tribe in and out of the car. I am sure she must have detected the look of devastation on my face as I sized up the sewing machine size motor that was about to replace the high output turbo charged motor of my Z-28. My friend, no one can deny that love is a powerful thing. The Bible says that love is stronger than a flood and after this experience I would agree. But, all joking aside, once the initial shock was over, I didn’t regret it!

I never thought I would hear a used car salesman say, “Shouldn’t you and your wife be leaving?” and especially before the contract was signed. But, as we sat in his office, this is what we were hearing. The salesman had seemed somewhat nervous when, looking at the car in the lot, Vonda had paused every couple minutes to wince in labor pain. Now he showed a much more elevated display of concern and made it audible.

After the, not so subtle, hint from the salesman that we should be leaving, we continued to hang around for a while longer. After all, we knew from experience that we probably had twenty more hours to go, and who wants to hang around a hospital any more than you must.

About thirty minutes later, the reality hit us that the salesmen would probably be less qualified than the baby doctor to deliver our soon coming child. So just in case, we headed for the hospital. In retrospect, I did not consider the fact that the car salesman probably would not have not charged as much!☺

The stork remembered the DW-40, streamlined the difficult process, and did his job much better this time. In only four relatively short hours our lives changed again. Equipped with dark hair, we were blessed with a new addition to the family—Meranda. Surprise! The baby doctor got it right this time, he predicted a girl! But he did cheat, he had his nurse do an ultrasound.

What an amazing blessing, named Meranda, God gave us that day! She is such a huge blessing in our lives and the lives of many others! Though in her younger years she was more reserved, in her high school years she transformed into a social butterfly. Meranda loves people and people love her. If you ever meet Meranda she will steal your heart in the first forty-five seconds and never give it back!

If you ever doubt her ability to love people, travel to a small town nestled in the hills of Honduras and make your way to an orphanage located there. Upon arrival, inquire about Meranda and you will find about eighty youngsters who will testify of her ability to love. Following high school, she took a six-month mission adventure to this place, and while there she got a taste of her own medicine—they stole her heart and haven't given it back. She is now on the organization's board of directors and plays a significant role in the well-being of those precious little ones.

Several times over the years Vonda and I have had the privilege to lead some mission trips to that same area. We were blessed to stay on the orphanage campus and hold some meetings in the local town. One day our interpreter, Meranda, Vonda and I were walking through the town. After passing a half dozen shops and people running out and giving Meranda hugs with "Meee-rannn-dddaaaa" on their lips, the interpreter turned to us and said, "I think Meranda should run for mayor!"

Our first two children, Nikki and Meranda, were sixteen months apart. God used these little ones to bring spiritual awakening to our

lives. Up until then we had little regard for our spiritual well-being, but after holding these two precious gifts, that we love more than life itself, their spiritual well-being became our concern.

There is a misconception that Satan loves to plant in the minds of many today. Many do not take time to consider spiritual things because they are deceived into believing they must clean themselves up by breaking their bad habits and overcome their addictions, on their own, before they can come to the Lord! Thank the Lord, that is a lie! In Matthew 11:28-30 He invites the weary and heavy laden to come and learn of Him and find rest for their souls. It doesn't say we must clean ourselves up first. I think we have all been bound by the cords of our sin long enough to realize it is impossible for us to do this on our own. We can only come to Him as we are, sinful, helpless and dependent, and enjoy the privilege of spending time getting to know Him. Then, in His time and His way, He will take the desires for those things from us, and He will give us the victories.

The "clean yourself up first" lie, I had believed from the time I had fallen back into the world after my baptism at the age of thirteen until now. I had my favorite addictions, and the God of waterskiing ruling the throne of my life. At times, when I was exposed to spiritual things, I would feel the patient drawing love of God, but my lower passions won the battle.

Finally, the patient, longsuffering love of God broke through the self-chosen darkness in both our lives. We began to attend church more often and attend ski tournaments less often on God's Holy Sabbath Day. The magnitude of the responsibility of raising our children to know and serve God, and the time we began to spend with Him, melted away the barriers that we had allowed to be erected.

An example of how God was working in our lives happened to both Vonda and I at the same time. One of our addictions was the mesmerizing music of the world. It was normal for us, and especially for me, to have my earthshaking music blasting anytime we were alone in the car. For me this was on my trips to and from work. One day I became bored with the rock station I was listening to and began to station surf. I came across a Christian station and decided to check it out. A month later, I realized that I had never changed the station.

About six weeks later, Vonda and I talked and realized that in her car, at the same time, the same thing had happened to her. That is the way God works in our lives when we allow Him to and when we seek Him. Accepting the Lord back into my life wasn't the dramatic experience that some may have. It was the culmination of many years of the Lord's patient love and drawing of my heart to Him.

About the time of the radio station experience, our church board had met and were electing church officers. Our names were submitted for various offices. We were shocked, but considered it an honor to serve the Lord this way in our new found walk with Him. As the months ticked by our closeness to the Lord increased. Then, as described in an earlier chapter, the day came when I finally put God where He deserved to be--on the throne of my life. I still enjoyed skiing and competing when I could do so without hurting my Lord by violating the day that He has asked those who love Him to keep holy.

We were blessed to have a little heaven on earth in our small home with our special little family. God patiently helped us to grow from newborns to toddlers in our Christian walk. Little answered prayers here and there developed our faith and trust. We did not realize that some huge blessings and challenges were about to take place in our lives.

Career Transmutation! - 6

Five years had flown by, and it was 4 a.m. on a warm summer morning. I sat alone in an upstairs room of our little home. With my head in hands and tears rolling down my face, I cried, "Lord, I know you haven't brought me this far for me to fail, but this is impossible!" I knew it would take a miracle to overcome this mountain that was in my way. I said, "Father, I want your will in my life. If you want me to pursue this path, it will take a literal miracle, so I put it in your hands."

Two weeks after our marriage we had moved to the area where I had been raised. A radiation therapy facility had recently opened in that area, and I had been offered a job opportunity there. We had been blessed over the five years that we lived there and, with the help of my brother and brother-in-law who were builders, we had built a cute little country-style home. The icing on the cake was the cute dormers and

heart shaped dowels on the front porch that we handcrafted ourselves. It was our little paradise on earth. During this time, God had been patiently growing us from the Christian newborn stage to toddlers. Our faith had grown with the many challenges and answered prayers along the way.

We loved the area, our home, and our church. I was very blessed to work at an amazing place with many wonderful people, but now there was one thing about my job that weighed heavy on my heart. I worked side-by-side with two other radiation therapists throughout my day. I had graduated with one of them from radiation therapy school and we were very good friends. Over the years, Vonda and I also become close friends with the other therapist and her family. The challenge was that when the two of them were working together a synergistic effect of negativism occurred and I was caught in the middle.

It was a difficult situation that escalated to the point where I was pleading with God for delivery. Though I loved them, everyone and everything else about the facility, I began going on job interviews thinking that this was the only answer to the situation. Soon I came to the realization that no matter where you go all things will not be perfect. Though I quit the job search, I daily continued to ask for a miracle from God to somehow remedy the situation. At the time, I didn't have the guts to tell them what I was feeling. I considered, and still do consider, them both as good friends. I hope after reading this they still feel the same!

One day our supervisor came to all the therapists and announced that the radiation dosimetrist was leaving. He said that administration would consider training one of us for the position and encouraged any who were interested to apply. My heart leapt with joy and gratitude. In my human wisdom, I was sure this was the answer to my prayers! I was the only one of the therapists that treated the medical physicist with respect. I was the only one with a bachelor's degree. He would be the one choosing, training, and supervising this person. In my mind, this was a sure deal for me! The responsibility of the dosimetrist is to plan the delivery of the radiation treatments on a computer. This was done in another area of the building and it seemed like the perfect solution.

A couple of weeks later, I was sitting at the treatment console when our supervisor walked by, escorting a gentleman. He introduced him to us as someone interviewing for the dosimetry position. My heart dropped to my feet, *"Surely not Lord!"* I thought. A few days later, my fears were confirmed when they hired him for the job. To say that I was devastated would be an understatement! I thought this was the perfect solution. I would have been working in another room about fifty feet away with peace and solitude. And to make the deal even sweeter, there would have been an increase in my salary. For the weeks to come I dwelt on negative thoughts and did not trust in God's promise to work all things out for my good. Little did I realize that, despite my lack of faith and trust, He had something much greater in store for me.

The new dosimetrist and I quickly became good friends. He was a very smart, social, and likable guy. During this time, my work assignment was on the treatment simulator which had me working directly with him and the medical physicist. The physicist also works in the radiation therapy department and is the expert in charge of all the technical aspects of the radiation therapy department. These include machine commissioning, calibrations, quality assurance, and treatment planning delivery.

My first year out of radiation therapy school, I worked as a therapist close to the university where I met my wife. At that facility, the medical physicist and I became friends and he became a mentor to me. After our move to the new facility, there arose a need for physics support, so I recommended him for a physicist position. He flew periodically to provide the needed physics coverage and, eventually, took the full-time onsite position. Over all the years that I had known and worked with him, he would occasionally prompt me to consider furthering my education by going to graduate school to become a physicist.

Every time he brought the subject up I would think, *you must be Nuts! It has been eight years since I had college algebra and I barely survived that. You don't know my math and science background. I will never take an onslaught of advanced math and physics classes just to be able to begin the gauntlet of graduate school of physics. Besides, I can't even spell it!"* I didn't know much about it, but what I did know was that even the title physicist was scary because it implied knowing a lot of

physics. I also knew I had never taken even a general physics class in my life. I dodged it in high school and college and certainly did not take it as a major. The only physics I had was a basic radiation physics class in X-ray and therapy school. This certainly did not qualify me for a graduate school in physics. Little did I realize how the overwhelming reality of this fact would one day affect my life.

Now I was working with the new dosimetrist who had taken “my” position. In our conversations I shared about the trials of my work environment. With tongue in cheek, I let him know that, thanks to him, I was still suffering. I also shared with him what our physicist friend had been proposing to me over the years and that it could be a potential solution to my dilemma. About a week later, he broke this news to me, “You have gotten me excited about the idea, why don’t we both apply and go to grad school together?” I guess this is all it took to push me over the line to even consider it. I thought, *perfect, either this will work out and by a miracle I will get accepted and be delivered from my dilemma; or I won’t get accepted and at least my physicist friend won’t bug me about it anymore.*

Although, still far from being a mature Christian, I knew this was not something into which I would lightly enter. After a few weeks of discussion with my wife and much prayer, the application was completed and sent. I prayed, “Lord, this can potentially bring a huge change to our lives. I need some clear-cut signs to know you are leading, otherwise, it will be impossible.”

If God did open the doors and I took on this challenge, I knew it would not be God’s will for me to study and work so much that I would never see my family. At this point in my life I had a sweet wife and two daughters, one and two and a half years of age. I prayed, “Lord, the first big sign I need is to get accepted! Second, I need the finances to survive through school.” With my far less than wonderful grades I knew the first sign would be a major hurdle. Also, through college I had kept the same philosophy I had in high school—avoid every math and science class possible. This obviously would not increase my chances of getting accepted.

The second issue of finances was no less a major obstacle. All through undergraduate school I had worked long hours to avoid debt

(and to get a boat). In this case of having family, though avoiding debt is important, I didn't see the wisdom in sacrificing my family for a career advancement. A few days later I received an invitation to the Executive Directors office of the facility where I worked. He said he had heard that I was thinking about going to school to obtain a graduate degree in medical physics and he wanted to make me an offer. The offer was that the facility would give me an interest free loan that I didn't have to start payment on until I had graduated from school. He also said he foresaw the need of physics coverage in the future. He said there may be an opportunity here, but he could not promise that. After picking my jaw up off the ground, I told him how much I appreciated the offer and that I should know in about a week if I was accepted or not and I would let him know.

Now I was really getting scared, it looked as if this could happen. The days painfully ticked by and finally the letter came. "Congratulations Mr. Beerman, you have been accepted to the graduate program for the fall quarter. Your acceptance is conditional upon your completion of a course of differential equations by the second quarter of the program." There were no conditions on taking any undergraduate physics courses. In my ignorance I thought, *I guess radiation and theoretical physics must not be that relevant to each other and the basic radiation physics class I had taken must be enough.*

Obviously, the reviewer of my records had this same misconception and boy were we both wrong. A fact that I would soon discover all too clearly! As I look back, I believe God's hand was in that oversight also. If there would have been additional science classes to take before going, I would not have decided to take on the challenge. And if I had taken and passed them and later made it through graduate school, I would have been tempted to believe that I had succeeded by my own ability. The way God worked it out, if I succeeded, there would be no question as to the source of my success.

Wow! I had been accepted! Additional confirmation of God's hand leading me, was that this school was well respected and was not easy to get into, especially for someone with my academic background and grades. I didn't know whether to clean out my pants or call Vonda first! This was terrifying and exciting at the same time. God had

confirmed both major signs making it obvious that He was calling me to do this.

With much fear and trepidation, I spent a lot of time on my knees! In those prayers, my vow was, "Lord, by your grace, help me to keep my priorities straight; You first, family second, and to treat school like a job and keep it in third place." I determined that I would get up early and work hard all day, but the evenings were to be spent with my family no matter the academic cost. Whether presentations, research papers or final exams were the next day, my family would have my time. If I could not keep these priorities in order, I would pack the family up and head back to my previous position as therapist and have peace that I had made the right decision. I knew it would never be God's will to neglect Him or my family.

By no coincidence, I had been impressed to apply for graduate school about nine months prior to the start of the program. The conditional acceptance was based on completion of a math course called differential equations, by the end of the second quarter. This class was a prerequisite for many classes but in particular a very difficult nuclear engineering course that I would be taking the third quarter. At this point in time, I had only taken college algebra and that had been eight years ago. This meant, for me to be able to complete the many math courses I needed by the deadline, I would have to start immediately.

I enrolled in college trigonometry at the local University. Due to a schedule conflict, I had to take a self-taught independent study course. With prayer, this went better than I had anticipated until about half way through when things really became difficult. Call me a wimp, but to teach myself high level math proved to be a challenge. One Sunday afternoon, some friends from church came by for a visit. I happened to be at the kitchen table chiseling away at my next trigonometry lesson with limited success. Our friend was an electrical engineering major at the local University and scheduled to graduate in a couple months. Being an engineering major, he had recently taken all of the same math courses on my agenda, including the one I was currently struggling with, so he offered some help.

I weaved into the conversation an explanation about the program I was entering that fall. He listened intently and then put us back on track with the lesson. A couple of weeks later, I receive a call from him, "Guess what Merlin? I have applied, been accepted, and am going to graduate school with you!" God is so good! He provided us with some good friends to hang out with, and sympathize with, and also bring support in ways I didn't even realize that I would need.

A few more weeks passed and I hit a barrier in the trigonometry class that I could not break through. After the intensity of my prayers increased, I felt impressed to call the university to see if they could recommend a private tutor. They recommend a high school math teacher that lived just down the road from where I worked. She wanted to keep her upper level math skills sharp and was looking for this type of opportunity. For the next couple of months, she stopped by the facility where I worked and met me in the conference room for math class. The Lord knew just who I needed and brought her at the right time to my door. With God's blessing, I survived that class.

To stay on schedule, I had to complete a calculus course in the summer term just prior to packing our bags for the move. As if I were not challenged enough with my pitiful math background, I had to take this five-hour calculus course in eight weeks. In a normal semester, it would require a one-hour class five days a week. In the summer this meant double the class time and double the homework load. Even if I were not working ten-hour days and had proficient math skills, this would still have been challenge enough. For me it WAS impossible!

There I sat, that warm summer morning at 4 a.m. with head in my hands and crying out to the Lord. The mountain before me was seventy-four pages assigned the day before on the first day of calculus class. I ended the prayer of distress with peace. Either God would do a miracle, or He wouldn't. Up to this point, I had done all that I could do. That evening our neighbors came over to visit. The wife was a strong Christian believer. The husband, once a believer, had seen hypocrisy in his spiritual mentors. He was looking to men instead of Christ for his example and had turned agnostic. This person was a wonderful man and an amazing friend and this would soon become evident.

As we visited, I shared my plight with him about the huge math assignment due the next day and the impossibility of my getting through it. In sympathy he said, "Let's look at it and see if I can help; I had all that math about ten years ago, but not sure if I will remember it." In my lack of faith, I said to myself, *you have got to be joking, we are going to spend fifteen minutes and I will be able to complete my seventy-four-page assignment?* Still, I was grateful for his kindness in the attempt. A few minutes later, it was time for him to head home and put the kids to bed. He said, "What time do you study in the morning?" I told him I studied from about 4-6 a.m. He said, "I will see you at my house at 4."

The Bible says that there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother and that certainly fit the description of this amazing friend. For the next eight weeks, he pulled me through calculus every morning at 4 a.m. and then went to work his ten-hour day. The amazing thing is, he had no preparation time and hadn't seen this material for ten years. We would sit down and without a moment's hesitation, he would give a better explanation than my university professor. He made the comment many times that he was surprised that he remembered the materials so well. By God blessing my friend with the ability to recall this knowledge, and his unselfishness to share it at the expense of his sleep, I passed the class. I thank God for such a friend and will be forever grateful for his sacrifice in my behalf.

It is my prayer that this experience was in some way a testimony that God does exist and how He works in our lives. Of all people, this friend knew what a miracle it was that I passed the class. And it would be a much greater miracle if I became a physicist! My prayer is that God blesses this friend for his ministering to me and that one day he will accept Christ in his life again.

Nuclear Explosion and Learning Confusion! - 7

"If I even suspect that you have worked together on any assignments, you will be kicked out of here so fast your head will spin and I'll black ball you from every college and university in the United States." *Wow! Welcome to grad school,* I thought, as these words from one of my professors rang in my ears. She had just laid down the law of how her class was going to go. This was not the pep talk that I had

hoped to receive for my nonexistent confidence and optimism. She followed her counsel with our first assignment, “Before the next class you need to cover the first 71 pages and do the problem sets at the end of each section. This first week we will review everything you learned in your four years of undergraduate physics and then we will get to the good stuff.”

This confirmed my fear that I had experienced the day before when I sat in orientation. I had looked around at my peers, all having undergraduate degrees in physics, math, and / or engineering. I thought, *Merlin, what were you thinking? Your stupidity runs deeper than your ACT score revealed!* When I was applying for graduate school, I had somehow dodged taking the GRE (Graduate Record Exam) and I had thought that I was just lucky. Now my thoughts were, *maybe that would have prevented me from making this huge mistake that will cost my precious family thousands of dollars and a lot of unnecessary stress.*

Overwhelmed with the feeling of failure and destitution, these distraught words came from my mouth “You might as well start packing our bags!” Having just left this first class, I stood speaking into a campus security phone located just outside the science building. These were not exactly the words of encouragement and faith that I should have been sharing with my stressed wife. You would think that after all the miracles of acceptance in the program, getting through the math courses to this point, the finances being provided, and many other miracles that I would have had invincible faith. Not so, like the Israelites, I was quick to grumble and ready to head back to my proverbial “Egypt.”

My mind wandered back to when we left our cute little home. Pulling out of the driveway I expected to hear someone picking a banjo and singing the Beverly Hillbillies theme song. If your too young to relate to this, Google it! With our lime green 1972 Ford and our red open utility trailer stacked high with furniture, we had begun our fifteen-hour journey. It is a blessing that the Lord designed our minds to block out trauma, I don’t recall anything about the two-day trip with my wife and our kids strapped in their car seats, but we evidently made it.

Vonda’s mother worked for a “Show Home” company that enabled us to rent a nice place at half price. Somehow, we were convinced this was a “win, win, win situation.” The home owner had

“Home Managers” equipped with great furniture, living in the homes that they were desperately trying to sell. The show home company received the half-priced rent, and the Show Home Managers only paid the half rent. The fine print, that we had ignored, read something like this, “You must be moved from the property within ten days of notice if the house sells.” We had arrived and hurriedly settled into our rented condominium just in time for classes to start. We took the bait with a surefire strategy--move into a place you “Know” won’t sell. To our dismay, in a matter of weeks we would be moving again.

Since this condo was on the perimeter of the city and the school was in the middle, I had a two-hour commute of walking, bus riding, and train riding. Tiring fast of this routine, we took the opportunity at hand to move into another Show Home located down town. This was an interesting structure built in 1935 and was on the market for an outrageous price. *Surely no one would buy this place!* Wrong again, in six weeks we were packing our bags again at “a moment’s notice.” With the stress of school, we decided we didn’t want to be moving every month or two, so we found an apartment close to campus to rent. I often thanked the Lord for a five minute commute, no traffic, buses, trains, and no spontaneous moving!

Now my mind flashed back to the issue at hand. That evening following that first traumatic day of class, I had the chance to visit with my electrical engineering friend. For him, with his engineering background, solving the physics assignments was like second nature; for me it was overwhelming, and I barely knew where to start. My undergraduate degree consisted of fact memorization of facts and preparation for administrative type functions. Not for problem solving of theoretical physics equations. “I would be glad to tutor you through it, but you heard what she said in class.” Indeed I had, and the feeling of being overwhelmed had only increased as the day progressed. The thread of hope I had seemed to have just slipped from my grasp. I thanked him for his willingness to help. I then headed home to discuss our move back to my bondage in “Egypt” with Vonda.

To add pain to my misery, I had homework to figure out from my other three class and had to meet with a tutor to begin the Calculus III course I had enrolled in to stay on schedule with my conditional

acceptance. By God's blessing, the other instructors were relatively merciful.

When all else fails get some sleep, this was and still is my motto. Even under this much stress, I could almost instantaneously fall asleep. Vonda often accused me of being one of those dolls that when you lay them down their eyes shut. At the time, I thought she was just jealous of this perfected talent of mine. Now I know it was due to months of sleep deprivation due to early morning math sessions.

Bright and early the next morning my alarm went off and, as my custom had become, I found a place to worship my Lord in peace and quiet. There is no greater privilege than accepting His daily invitation to spend time with Him. He loves each one of His earthly children with an indescribable love and promises to work all things out for our good if we will let Him! This day I especially needed His Spirit to comfort and lead me. By the end of our prayer together, and time in His written Word, He had given me the peace and direction that I desperately sought.

He convicted me to claim the promise of Philippians 4:6, 7. "Be anxious for nothing but in all things with prayer, supplications, and thanksgiving let your requests be made known and the peace that passes understanding will guard you heart and mind in Jesus Christ the Lord." I recommitted to do all within my power to keep the vow of priorities that I had made (God, Family, then School) and trust Him to do the rest. I wish I could say from that point forward I never waffled from this renewed faith, but often I did. And God, in His patience, was faithful each morning to fill me again with His peace. Spending time with Him daily and claiming Philippians 4:6, 7 and Romans 8:28 became my strength and cornerstone.

In my time with the Lord that morning I felt impressed to approach "Killer Cartwright; my professor, and ask for mercy. This nickname had its obvious origins. She had a chip on her shoulder about the unequal treatment of women in the academic world and she made no effort to hide it. She gave three times the research and homework in her class to prove her point. Much to my dismay, she not only was to be the professor of several of my classes during the program, but she was my assigned academic advisor, which would become a major factor later on.

The next morning, upon my request for her private counsel, she escorted me into her office. I spent the next fifteen minutes explaining about my academic background or, I should say, the lack thereof. In my quest for mercy, I left no stone unturned. I explained where my career had led to this point and the transplanting of my family to this city for two years while I attempted to improve my children's future (milk it when you can!). Then came the plea, I explained about my friend David being in the same program and his willingness to tutor me; but, after her well explained policy of no interaction between classmates, we didn't want to do anything wrong. I told her that if she would allow this friend to tutor me, I would not turn in any homework that I could not reproduce on my own or on a test. The room filled with an awkward silence. I know it was the power of the Holy Spirit that moved her to finally say, "Okay, you have my permission. We'll see how it goes!" Thus began the greatest challenge of my life.

Though this would cause me to fall behind on the math schedule, due to being overwhelmed from all my other classes, I elected to discontinue the Calculus class until the next quarter. My logic was that I needed to survive my core classes and not let this one class cause me to drown. Each graduate student is offered a small 6' x 6' office in the basement or attic. My routine was soon established. I would rise very early each morning, have my time with the Lord, head to school and spend the entire day immersed in study, only leaving my little den in the attic long enough to go to class. The quarters slowly went by with study, research papers, presentations, and exams. Many small miracles happened daily and large ones periodically. I knew for certain that, if I survived, all the credit would be the Lord's. I worked hard and did my part, but there was no way possible way for me to accomplish this in my own power. I will tell of a few significant events that happened along the way.

The time had come for the infamous Nuclear Engineering class. In this class, we studied the design of a nuclear reactor facility and did all the calculations to back up our justifications. To say I was overwhelmed would be an understatement. I met another graduate student named Ruben. Ruben was a unique guy with his success mapped out. His method was to have filing cabinets full of past exams

from all the classes he would be taking. One of them was this Nuclear Engineering class and he made the offer to share them with me.

Some teachers specifically announced that reviewing previous exams was not appropriate academic behavior. They gave similar counsel given by Dr. Cartwright about what the result would be. The temptation to accept his offer without asking my professor was short lived. Soon I visited my professor's office and explained that I was struggling. Before I could ask about the option of reviewing previous tests, he said, "Probably the best thing you can do is get ahold of some of my old tests. They will have problems like the type of problems you will need to solve on your upcoming exams." God is so good! By His provisions, grace and a lot of hard work I made an "A" in this class—the class considered to be the most difficult in the program.

God had already provided the solution to my dilemma, not only to pass this class, but to pass it with an "A". I would later find out the significance of this "A"! The prerequisites for the advanced math classes and my conditional acceptance were the completion of several classes, but especially this one. Despite the fact I had passed the class, my official acceptance into the program, and to eventually graduate, was still hinging on completion of the math prerequisites.

The weeks and months slowly ticked by and only by God's grace I survived. I looked forward to and was so blessed by the arrival of the Sabbath each week. This gift from God that I had spent so many years trampling upon became such a blessing in my life! After six days of stress, and being pushed beyond my limit, it was such a blessing to know that no matter what research paper or final exam was approaching, I could rest mentally and physically for twenty-four hours each week. A blessed time to renew my relationship with the Lord and to spend time with my family. God is so good to give the gift of the Sabbath to all mankind. He created us and, in the owner's manual—the Bible, He spelled out just what we need. What the world considers a legalistic requirement that has been done away with couldn't be more the opposite. There is no scriptural evidence to support that any change has been made and it couldn't be more of a blessing! We are told in the fourth commandment not only to rest but why we should rest—as reminder each week that He is our loving Creator and provider. My

heart was heavy for my classmates who did not have that sanctuary of time each week to look forward.

With God All Things Are Possible! - 8

“I CAN’T BELIEVE THE _____ INCOMPETENCE OF THIS SCHOOL!” These words erupted from the mouth of Dr. Cartwright, my professor and academic advisor. In her class I had written extensive research papers about nuclear reactor meltdowns, atomic explosions, and nuclear fallout; but, except for her “Welcome to graduate school speech” on the first day of class, I had never witnessed these phenomena firsthand.

Without explanation for her unexpected wrath, she quickly picked up the phone and dialed the extension of the Academic Dean. “I CAN’T BELIEVE THIS _____ SCHOOL GRANTS _____ CONDITIONAL ACCEPTANCE FOR ANY _____ REASON.” For the sake of your children, I will not repeat the expletives or the rest of the one-sided conversation that followed. It will suffice to say that, in a not so politically correct manner, she verbalized her extreme displeasure in what obviously had happened in the past.

As I was nearing the conclusion of the program, an announcement was made that. To reduce the cost of operation, the School of Health Physics and Nuclear Engineering would be moved under the School of Engineering administratively. This meant that since our degree program required more hours than did the engineering graduate degrees, our requirements would be lowered to match theirs.

We had just begun a new quarter. A quick mental evaluation revealed that if I added a class to my current quarter, and one to the next, that could become my final quarter. I could complete the program earlier than I had planned. With my family living on loans, this would greatly lower our debt. What a blessing from God! How often does a school reduce their graduation requirements and just at the perfect time?

I quickly added another class to my schedule but, while in the process of this, my heart sank. As if a light bulb came on, I realized that I had not even been officially accepted into the program. The condition

of the advanced math prerequisites had not been met. Even though I had passed the classes that they were meant to prepare me for, technically, I still had to complete these classes to graduate. Quarter by quarter I had been in survival mode and the stress and thought of these extra classes had literally not even crossed my mind. I know that something as traumatic to me as having to get through three more upper level math courses could not simply slip my mind, but now this seemed to be the case. Retrospectively, I believe the freedom from that extra stress was from the Lord.

After a lot of prayer asking for God's wisdom and leading, I kept feeling the conviction, *Go talk with Dr. Cartwright, your academic advisor about this*, I thought, *Wow Lord, of all people her? Really?* In the first place, she terrifies me, she was the same professor who had delivered the warm welcome in my first class on the first day of graduate school. Over the course of the program, I had to take three more courses from her and her intensity and attitude had not subsided. Secondly, she is the most hardcore professor, on the campus of this university, concerning academic achievement.

I wish I could tell you that my faith was invincible, but it was extremely lacking. As was my custom, I had spent time with the Lord that day. I had surrendered my future to Him and He had given me peace in whatever the outcome might be. The appointment finally came. I entered Dr. Cartwright's office and she greeted me cordially and had me take a seat in a small chair across from her large, intimidating desk. I breathed a prayer to heaven and then explained my dilemma. I told her how I had been accepted into the program conditionally, on completion of math through differential equations. Because of being overwhelmed with surviving my other classes, I had not yet had the opportunity to complete the extra math courses.

Now, here I was, listening to the tongue lashing she was giving the Academic Dean; and, at the same time trying to figure out how I could assume the fetal position in my chair. Finally I gave up on that idea and shrunk down in my seat. I was not sure if I should plug my ears from the profanity, use my hands to protect my head from potential flying objects, or to just take that opportune moment to quietly leave. So, like a deer in the headlights, I just sat there and awaited my fate. After a couple of minutes that seemed like hours, she jammed the

phone back onto its receiver. Then, as if I were not present, she turned her gaze to the window.

After the redness in her face somewhat subsided she rotated her chair in my direction. Then, in a skeptical voice said, "Okay Mr. Beerman, let's see what you have learned during your time here." Being my academic advisor, she quickly accessed my transcripts and began to review my classes and grades. Then came the dreaded words, "What happened Mr. Beerman, I see that you received a "C" in one of my classes."

In graduate school people are generally there to learn and not goof off so it is very competitive. You do all you can for an "A", receiving a "B" is average like a "C" would be in undergraduate school, and a "C" or anything lower is like failing. By God's grace I had survived the program with only one "C" and wouldn't you know it, it was in her class.

I proceeded to remind her that I had only missed a "B" by a fraction of a percent, but this didn't seem to impress her in a positive way anymore on this day than it had when I had pointed it out when that class had ended. Not the least bit phased by my unspoken plea for mercy, she continued her methodical evaluation of my records. Then came an unexpected, bi-polar change. Her face went from red with anger to a smile. "Mr. Beerman, you made an "A" in Nuclear Engineering! I am impressed! Of all the classes in the program this is the one that requires the most difficult level of math." I wasn't sure if this was a setup or how to react, so I simply nodded my head. She explained that her "first love" was nuclear engineering and that is where her heart is still. For the next fifteen minutes she proceeded to tell me about her passion.

Almost as quickly as the tide had earlier changed, she seemed to be jolted back to the reality of the moment. She sat there looking me intently in my eyes over the thick black frame of her glasses. No doubt deliberating my fate. She then reached in her desk drawer, pulled out a business card, and then forcefully handed it to me. "Mr. Beerman, don't you ever humiliate this school or yourself! If at any time in your career you need to perform a differential equation, it would behoove you to contact me!" She then picked up her phone, dialed "0", and with conviction said, "Give me the registrar please." After a brief hesitation

she said, "This is Dr. Cartwright from the school of medical physics. Please access the file for Merlin Beerman and remove the conditional status from his record so that he may graduate this winter quarter. He has completed the courses that require this prerequisite and has done so with exceptional grades."

She then turned back to me and, with hesitation and a questioning look she said, "Good luck Mr. Beerman, I am impressed that you will bring honor to your profession." As I stood to my feet to leave, our eyes met and her look of bewilderment conveyed the message, "I can't believe I just did that." Then from the lips of this atheist (now possibly agnostic) professor of evolutionary based science came the words that had just gone through my mind. She said, "Mr. Beerman, you must have somebody up there who is looking out for you." After just having, what seemed like, the world lifted from my shoulders, I am sure that my countenance reflected the words of my response, "I sure do, and I am grateful!" By the grace of God, He had blessed me with that "A" to move this ladies heart to extend grace to me.

The next couple of quarters eventually passed. Taped to my desk top were several scriptural promises that I had claimed many times a day during this time. I claimed the promise in Revelation 3:8 that says He put before me an open door and no person can shut it! I claimed Philippians 4:6, 7 and did my best not to worry and to accept the peace beyond my understanding that He desires to give.

Scripture says that God has our days penned in his book (Psalm 139:16). At this time, I did not realize that in the same way he had orchestrated the "A" in the Nuclear Engineering class to bring about this miracle; He was also orchestrating my return home a quarter early for a major reason soon to become apparent in my life. Less than a week after our return home, my father died in my arms from a very unexpected acute illness. God blessed me to be able to return home months earlier than expected so that I could have a week of precious time with my father. For this I am so grateful!

Though God doesn't cause the trials and tribulations of life, He does allow them if He sees, that in the future, it will work out for our good. He is more concerned with our eternal life than our earthly one. Often the purpose of these struggles is to help us realize that we can

trust Him who knows how to work out every detail of our lives for good! We look through earthly eyes, but He sees through the eyes of eternity. I have by no means arrived at a level of indestructible faith, but this testing valley in my life did greatly improved my ability to trust Him. And, because of the many miracles He did on my behalf, it is my privilege to give Him the glory!

Despite my fear of failure, by God's grace, I survived the presentations, research papers, and examinations of the last two quarters so that I could graduate. The graduation date was posted, and it was on a Saturday morning. Now came the testing time for me! Would I walk up the isle of that secular event on God's Holy Day that He asked me to keep holy and accept the glory for myself? Or would I, like the water skiing mentor of my teenage years, choose to give Him the glory by keeping His seventh day holy? My first selfish thought was, *I worked so hard to achieve this goal. How could I not march in my own graduation?* I give God the glory that He gave me instantaneous peace. I knew that was my answer. I would show my gratefulness and love for Him by obeying His fourth commandment. It was not legalism, but my joy and privilege to honor Him in this way.

Board Certification and Life Preservation - 9

The amazing journey through graduate school had now come to an end. The time had come to call the director of the facility at home about my return as a physicist. Though they knew the traveling physicist would not provide physics support indefinitely; they had made no promise of employment to me after graduation. Before calling the administrator for an official word, I had called my dosimetrist friend to see what my chances were. "They just hired him as full-time physicist and Vice-President for Medical Physics and he is moving to the area." With this being the only place within one-hundred miles that I could work as a radiation oncology medical physicist, my heart sank.

Without a position there, we would have to sell our cute home and relocate. We would also have to leave family, church, and the social roots we so dearly loved. With prayer and time with the Lord, we willingly submitted our future into His hands. We knew that He had brought us through the many miracles of graduate school and that He had a plan for our future. Again, we didn't have indestructible faith, but

we had seen God lead in our lives so many times and now trusted Him to do it again.

I made the call to my home facility and was so glad I did. I was soon blessed to be offered a position as a “junior physicist.” The patient load had almost doubled in my absence, and they saw the need for additional physics support beyond what the Director of Physics could give. Retrospectively, I can see what a huge blessing God had orchestrated. The school I graduated from was very well known for its academics, but also known for the lack of clinical experience it provided. If they had not hired Jared, there is no way I could have safely filled the solo position. God was so good to me to provide wonderful, brilliant and experienced mentors in both my friend the dosimetrist and the physicist.

In His Word, the Lord has says that He is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think (Ephesians 3:20). When we allow Him to, He will bring about His plan for our lives and it is often greater than we can imagine. He longs to give us a future and a hope (Jeremiah 29:11). This has certainly been the case in my life. The dosimetrist position that I thought had unfairly slipped from my grasp, was the highest achievement I could imagine for myself. Little did I realize that the Lord would miraculously get me through medical physics school and bring me back as the physicist to supervise the dosimetrist.

If green is the term used to describe inexperience and lack of confidence, then I must have been florescent, lime green! I was blessed to spend the next two years under the patient training of my dosimetrist and physicist supervisors. They patiently molded me and, two years later, I was promoted from junior physicist to a staff physicist position. Though my friend and I both knew he would have made a better physicist than I will ever be, he had not been accepted into the graduate program. After I returned from graduate school, he was the one that trained me in the critical area of dosimetry and to eventually become his director. Despite this awkward situation, he patiently trained me and never showed any jealousy or animosity. Still today he is an amazing and well-respected friend. He excelled in the field of dosimetry and became the president of the national organization for his profession.

During this time, I began preparation for the physics board certifications exams offered by the American Board of Radiology. This organization offers testing and national certification to physicians, physicists, and other radiology related specialties and subspecialties. It has been twenty-five years, so if a medical physicist reads this and notices that I mess up the details, please forgive me, but this is what I remember. The boards at that time included two written exams which I would be eligible to take after two years of clinical experience. There was one day of written exams for general physics and on the second day, a written exams for your field of specialty. Then, if a candidate passed these, they would be invited back for an oral exam twelve months later.

Exceptionally smart like my mentors, I am not. If the truth be known, an optimist would consider me of average intelligence at best. Thankfully, God has blessed me with the ability of organization. With the aid of a wise counselor—my physics mentor, we choose the appropriate books and materials. I then mapped out my study habits and goals for the next two years, and by God's grace, I stuck to it.

The physicist I had been hired to work under, having a PhD in physics and math, dual board certifications, and thirty years of experience, was a patient and brilliant mentor and a wonderful friend. Over those two years I would come to his office with countless questions. I am sure each time I left he must have been shaking his head thinking, *this guy doesn't have a chance*. By the end of graduate school, I could stumble my way through the practical medical physics calculations. Thanks to my electrical engineer friend's tutoring, I had survived graduate school; but, a master of general theoretical physics problem solving, I was not.

If my mentor didn't believe in God's ability to do miracles, he did after I walked in his office two years. With letter in hand, I showed him that I had passed all the written exams. I had never seen this friendly and talkative guy speechless, but that day it happened. Obviously amazed and happy for me he finally found his voice long enough to say, "Congratulations! Very good!" I think all would agree, for someone who has never had a general physics course in his life to pass the physicist level general physics exam is nothing short of miraculous!

The timing of taking the boards was like using a two-edged sword. On one edge, it was to your benefit to take the written exams as soon as possible after graduate school, hopefully, before the decay of your theoretical knowledge. On the other edge, the oral exam was based on practical experience, so the longer you are out of school, the better your odds are to pass this portion.

By God's grace, I had passed the written exams, but now came time to step it up a few notches! Oral boards were twelve months away. The format was for the candidates to be tested in the six major categories of clinical radiological physics. Without wasting time, I organized the materials and began my plan of study. One of the six major categories was radiation dosimetry. Since I had just spent the past two years working in this area of the clinic, I thought, *if I had to I could wing this one*. I focused on the other five hoping to find time for the study of this category at the end, but no such luck!

The oral boards were held in an ancient motel in Louisville, Kentucky. I was told that they had held them there every year because it was the hotel with the greatest number of rooms on one floor. I guess they didn't want us refreshing our memories in the staircase or elevator between examiners. The candidates would all meet in an orientation room. The rules were spelled out and each person was handed a piece of paper containing the names of their examiners, the times, and rooms in which they would be found. They would then use a high-tech method to notify the examiners and examinees that their sessions were starting and ending—someone would walk down the hall banging a gong!

We were each assigned a total of six examiners with a total testing time of two hours. When testing time began you would enter the designated room, show your identification, and step up to an easel. The examiner would hand you a card with a question and you would begin. Each examiner would have thirty minutes with each candidate to cover the six major categories. Since that is not humanly possible, they would start you out with a basic question and then take you from that super highway to whatever backroad they desired. Usually this was an area that included their area of expertise and where they had the most experience.

I forgot to mention that some of these examiners were the ones who wrote the textbooks we used to prepare. It was a given fact that you would not succeed at bluffing them. If you didn't know the answer, you better admit it and give a logical course of action on how, and from what source, you would look to find the answer. And then you prayed that it didn't happen more than once. The board exams are not just a formality. They are difficult for even the most talented and educated. I am sure there are a few out there that have passed all written and orals on their first attempt, but I have never personally met one.

The fateful day for oral boards was soon to arrive and I headed for Kentucky. Remember, I am the guy who is off the scale when it comes to fear of public speaking. To say I was terrified would be a huge understatement. After my early morning time with the Lord, I headed to the orientation room. The assignment slips were given, and the testing began. I don't remember very much of what happened after that. I am grateful to the Lord that my mind has blocked out the trauma of that day's events.

After six weeks of mental torture the results finally came. "Congratulations Mr. Beerman, you have passed your boards, except for a conditional pass in one category!" After my graduate school experience, I have learned that the word "conditional" is not a good thing! The "conditional pass" is a nice way of saying, "Hey dummy, you failed one of the six major categories and you are going to have to return in six months for retesting."

This was not an invitation that I was excited to receive. To say I was devastated is an understatement. I am slow to learn but I had learned not to base my self-worth on my ability or accomplishments. The deeper I fall in love with Christ, the more I can base my value on the price Christ paid for me. After taking a few days to catch my breath, by the strength of the Lord, the time of concentrated study began again.

The format for retesting a failed category was that you returned six months later to be tested in that one category by two examiners. On that one category you are roasted with great heat for the entire testing time. That translates into "You better know your stuff!" The day for retesting came and I headed for Kentucky again.

After my graduate school experience, I didn't have to be a board-certified physicist to know from Whom my strength and peace come. As was, and still is, my custom I got up early to spend time with my Lord, Saviour and Friend--the One who invented physics. I spent four hours with Him that morning in wonderful communion. After prayer, reading His Word, and listening to praise music, I was filled with peace and, at the same time, excited for what I believed He was about to do. I claimed the promise in 1 Timothy 1:7 that He had not given me the spirit of fear but of power, love and a sound mind.

As I sat in the orientation room waiting for my assignment slip, I contemplated the next few hours of my life. Sitting there I prayed, "Lord, give me Dr. Connors as an examiner that it can be a powerful testimony of your miraculous power and glory!" When the boards are given, there are dozens of examiners and hundreds of examinees. Dr. Connors, PhD, a professor of physics with a prominent research university, had a well-earned reputation that preceded him. He was known for using intimidation tactics. His goal appeared to be to find your area of weakness and, like a shark that smells blood, tear you to shreds. Rumor was that he considered it a feather in his hat to fail someone.

I was jolted back into reality as someone handed me my assignment sheet. It listed my two examiners for the day—Dr. Anderson and Dr. Connors! It was all I could do to contain myself from throwing my fist into the air and yelling "Yes!" I had no doubt in my mind that this was a sign from the Lord that I would walk out of that place as a board certified medical physicist.

Dr. Connors lived up to his reputation, and it was one of the most challenging days of my career. Thank the Lord they didn't make us wait six weeks for the results of retesting. For the next week, a constant battle would rage in my mind. Every waking minute of the day doubt would creep in and, by God's grace, faith would take its place. Now the moment of truth had come, I sat in front of the post office in my car nervously looking at the registered letter in my hand. "Lord, I prayed. I have given my life over to you. I don't believe that you have miraculously brought me this far for me to fail. But, no matter the results, I will praise you!"

With shaking hands, I open the envelope and read, "Dear Mr. Beerman, I am pleased to inform you that you passed the oral examination...In behalf of the Board of Trustees of the American Board of Radiology, I congratulate you on this achievement." My fears of the unknown turned to tears of joy! God had accomplished the impossible through me. His Word in 1 Corinthians 1:27 that says He uses the weakest of this world to confound the wise. What is impossible with man is possible with God (Mark 10:27)!

In my lack of trust I had often asked the question, "Lord, why did I have to waste six more months on concentrated study and spend a \$1,000 on travel and more on testing fees to go back and take it a second time?" I think everyone at times has asked similar questions about events in their lives, and many of those questions will not be answered until heaven. That is the purpose of our journey here on earth, to learn to trust Him always, though often we don't understand. He wants us to believe in His indescribable love for us and in His promise in Romans 8:28, "All things work together for good for those who love him and are called according to His purpose."

Now, twenty-five years later, I believe God has impressed me with the answer. First, I know that experience brought me closer to Him and my faith grew stronger as a result. Second, when I reflect on the details of my first oral exam and the reason for failure, I believe it came down to a single question. I was asked a question of which every physicist should know the answer, and I had gone totally blank. I remember the examiner showed pity as she gave me the opportunity to rethink my answer and I simply couldn't. For years after this trial, I kept mentally kicking myself for my stupidity. Now, years later, I believe God had a purpose in that outcome for the good of others.

Numerous times during my career, with God's help, I have discovered mistakes in patient setups and dose calculations while doing chart reviews. If they had gone undetected, the consequence would have caused major complications, including paralysis and death. Failure of this area of my boards heightened my awareness and gave me a much greater knowledge in these critical areas. At the time I didn't understand, but now I praise Him for the way it turned out.

Family Multiplication and Faith Transformation - 10

We had been back for a couple years from graduate school and decided it was time to grow our family. Nikki was about five years of age and Meranda was three and a half. One day I heard the words, "I'm pregnant!" Vonda held up a positive test strip from her recently acquired pregnancy kit. Everything seemed fine until a doctor's visit about four months into her pregnancy. The doctor's stethoscope revealed no heartbeat. The ultrasound that followed confirmed our fears. A day later, Vonda was in the hospital to remove the lifeless precious child from her womb.

Many suffer this type of pain and loss, and we were not exempt. Our hearts still grieve over the loss of this heavenly gift and pray for the privilege of raising this child in heaven. God, in His wonderful love, comforted us and gave us peace and strength through this trial. We still cling to the hope and promise for the day when there will be no more pain, suffering, and death; and the angels will place this little one in our arms at the resurrection.

After some time had passed, we were again inspired to expand our family. We were soon blessed with another beautiful baby girl named Kaylie. She came into the world on a special day--Easter morning. After her birth the nurses cleaned her up and the staff left us alone to bond with our new blessing from heaven. As we held her and prayed a prayer of dedication, we felt the power of the Holy Spirit flow through our bodies. God impressed us that He had a special plan for her life. God blessed Kaylie with many gifts, one of which is her strong faith. The Bible says we must have the faith of a child to enter the kingdom of heaven. One day we learned a powerful lesson of faith through Kaylie.

It was an ordinary homeschooling day. Before going upstairs to begin, Vonda decided to give our two parakeets, Samson and Delilah, a break from their cage. She let them perch on the floor-length wicker mirror in our room. Delilah, faithful to habit, climbed down to the bottom and sat gazing into the mirror serenading herself. Samson, true to his routine, stayed at the top. With chest held high and singing at the top of his lungs as if to say, "Hey, look at me I'm King!"

It was always entertaining and enjoyable to hear them sing, but on this day we heard more than singing. We were all busy about our duties when we heard a shrill that we had never heard before. Upon our quick arrival, we discovered that it was Delilah screaming for her life. Our dog had happened upon the festivities and thought that this was an ideal time for a picnic lunch! By the time we arrived at the scene, and removed her from the jaws of death, she was in terrible shape. Her tail feathers and part of her back end were missing. She also had a fatal gaping wound to her chest and one leg was mangled, attached only by a shred of tissue. In our human judgment, we thought there was no hope for this poor bird.

The other kids and Vonda were crying but Kaylie was sobbing pitifully! Between the wails of grief, I said that in mercy, we should put her out of her misery. That's when Kaylie piped in, "No Daddy, God can do miracles. I know He'll do it and He'll heal her Daddy, lets pray!" The whole family knelt in a circle and we prayed a prayer that went something like this, "Father, You said in Your Word to become as little children. We believe you meant for us to trust you as little children do, so we are going to trust you as Kaylie trusts you right now. In Jesus' name, we ask you to heal this bird. We thank you for it now, Amen." While praying this prayer Vonda and I both doubted and were thinking, *Lord, please help her trust in you and not be devastated when the bird dies.*

In faith, Kaylie prepared her hospital room--a shoebox with padding and some food and water. She said, "Let's put a stick across the top of the box. When she feels better in the night, she may want to stand on it." I thought to myself, "Wow Lord, that would be a huge miracle!" The next morning, we heard a bird singing and ran to Delilah and found her perched on one leg on the stick, her chest wound was completely closed, and her back end was totally healed! Her only remaining issues were missing some tail feathers and her dangling leg. About two weeks later, miraculously, Delilah was standing on both legs and eventually her tail feathers grew back in time! God is good!

God honored Kaylie's faith that day and at the same time taught us, as adults, a powerful lesson about faith. I am here to testify that He delights to give good gifts to His children when we come to Him in faith, believing as a child. He will carry out what you've asked according to His

will. We are proud of Kaylie who later went to college and became a certified vegan chef at a prominent university. She is now married to Daniel and is working as a chef. We know God has amazing plans for her life!

Our first four children, the child we lost and our three precious girls, were planned. But then came our surprise! This time we were blessed with a bouncing baby boy! After three girls, we assumed a fourth was coming, but we were wrong! Colton was a spoiled baby who had, what I am sure to him seemed like, four mothers! He was dragged around like a rag doll, but he loved it. Colton was and still is an amazing blessing in our lives!

As a toddler, Colton suffered a severe health challenge from which he almost died; but, by the power of intercessory prayer, his life was spared. Colton's gifts are an easy-going personality, patience, and perseverance. When he sets his mind on a task, he is determined to reach his goal.

One case that comes to mind is when he was about twelve, he decided that he wanted a 4-wheeler. To raise \$2,400 for a kid his age seemed overwhelming, so I decided to make him an offer. Though I was skeptical that he would make the goal, I told him that I would match any money he earned towards it. With true grit that would make John Wayne proud, Colton went to work. He cleaned, mowed, and did every other task we could come up with. Finally, out of desperation I gave him a wheelbarrow and some gloves and pointed to the horse pasture and told him that all the rocks needed to be removed. He stayed focused and eventually he had earned his half of the 4-wheeler. Now I had to come up with my half! Before long, we found the quad of his dreams and purchased it.

Over the years, though academics had very little appeal to him, Colton has demonstrated this same true grit and has accomplished some difficult goals. He is now a board-certified phlebotomist. We know that God has an amazing plan for his future and He will be a powerful worker for Him. Colton, like all our children, holds a very special place in our lives.

One day out of Vonda's mouth rang the words, "Honey, what's wrong?!" I had just entered the house returning from work. I told her I

was okay and, with tears streaming down my face, I described the song that I had just heard on the radio that had ripped my heart out, "I think it was called, "Butterfly Kisses" I said. I had a melt-down as I heard a story in song that the writer portrayed between himself and his child. A story of a heart touching bond that carried on through life and culminated on her wedding day.

One day shortly after the "Butterfly Kisses" melt-down, I was listening to Christian radio again. Someone on a talk show described their family custom. He would, rotating weekly, take his children on "Daddy Dates" for a special one-on-one time. This sounded like a wonderful blessing to me. Nikki the oldest was nine, Meranda was seven, Kaylie was four, and Colton was two when we started this wonderful tradition in our family.

Our dates would be at a restaurant or walking around the mall together. Many precious conversations were shared on just about every subject that you can imagine, including the birds and the bees! These precious times were amazing blessings to build our relationships and to be able to impart wise counsel about life. I purchased a journal for each of them and at the end of our dates we would sit in the car and write a letter to each other. On each of their first dates we went to the photography corner at Walmart and had daddy-daughter and daddy-son pictures taken to put in the front of their journals.

The date tradition was carried on faithfully up through their teen years and even, occasionally, into their twenties. Due to the busyness of life it became much less frequent though. This I extremely regret. Now I realize that was the time when my fatherly connection was needed the most. I failed to use this powerful opportunity as much as I should have.

The date journals are very valuable to me. As of the writing of this project, my three daughters have all flown from the nest and married wonderful young men. With an ocean of tears and emotions flowing, I created a video to the music of "Butterfly Kisses" compiling pictures and video clips from their childhood. At the wedding receptions of Nikki and Kaylie I read from their date journals and presented them their journals. Maybe I should truthfully rephrase that statement...as a

sentimental, emotional, blubbering father I presented the journals to them.

At Meranda's wedding, I gave what I pray was an inspiring ten-minute charge to her, soon to be, husband at the altar. With the same emotional composure, I also gave Meranda her date journal at their reception. I planned to include some select excerpts from their journals at this prime opportunity, but I resisted.

I wish the limited pages of this book could hold all my love and the precious stories of my treasured family. I am so thankful to the Lord for Vonda and each one of them. They are the greatest blessings in my life, second only to the Lord. Each one of my children are the apple of my eye, and I would gladly give my life for the saving of any one of them. I love them more than life itself. But, I don't want you to be misled to believe that I am an extraordinary husband or father. My failures are far too numerous to count, and I often claim the promise in God's Word that "love covers a multitude of sins" and "in our weakness He is strong." It is my prayer that they will remember the times of love, joy and closeness and forget when I have failed them.

In my experience as a Father, I have caught a glimpse of what our Heavenly Father experiences as He parents us. Along with this realization, I better understand the magnitude of His supreme sacrifice—His Son. I have such a tremendous love for my son and my daughters that I couldn't imagine allowing one of them to die to save someone as rebellious and underserving as I have been, but that is what He has done. And my friend His sacrifice was for you too!

To Lead or Not to Lead - 11

The years, like the wind, had blown by. We sold our little home and built our dream home that was big enough for our family on a hillside in the country. Our kids would finish their homeschooling for the day and then spend hours running and playing like carefree lambs in the fields around out home. Hours were spent with mom and dad jumping with them on the trampoline under the huge oak tree in the valley below.

When bored with the trampoline they would ride bikes, play house, or play with the animals. We look back on this as a very

treasured time in our lives. The cancer facility at which I worked was only fifteen minutes away, so I was able to go home for lunch and spend a few precious mid-day minutes with my family.

Upon arrival back from graduate school, I was hired as a junior medical physicist for two years. This was a training internship. Then, after becoming board certified, I was promoted and worked as a staff medical physicist for the next six years. I was privileged to gain valuable wisdom and experience under the same physicist that had taken the leadership position just prior to my return from graduate school. Over those eight years, the facility had added two other clinics in the area. The head physicist and I were kept busy providing physics support to all three facilities.

Now there I was, sitting in the Administrator's office as he was delivering the news. My heart pounded with deafening beats as I heard the words, "He is leaving and has recommended that you take his place as Director of Medical Physics, and I agree." Others in my position, having a better physics background and more confidence, would have considered this a huge career opportunity. To me it was terrifying! My safety blanket was about to be ripped out from under me. With a more experienced physicist above me, I always had someone to rely on for wisdom when needed. As director, I would not have that advantage.

I wish I could say I had invincible faith to believe that God could do this through me, but that wasn't the case. God had given many amazing manifestations of His leading in my career and life. Despite this my faith and confidence were found severely lacking. My thoughts were, *surely Lord, this can't be happening!* I had felt the same feelings of inadequacy that I felt that day in graduate school orientation. I had looked around at all those far more qualified to be there and thought, *Merlin, what were you thinking! What are you doing here!*

The Facility Director and I have a common bond. He was, and is, a sincere Christian who puts the Lord first in his career and life. After hearing the proposal at hand, I proceeded to spend the next fifteen minutes explaining all the reasons why I wasn't qualified. How it would be best for the patients and the facility to hire an experienced leader. I reminded him of how the field of medical physics is one of rapid technological change. As physicist, one of many responsibilities is to do

acceptance testing and commissioning of all new equipment and ultimately train and oversee those who use it. With my less than ideal physics background, I felt this could be better done by someone else like the current Director with a PhD and dual certification.

Without God in the equation, my logic could not have been wiser! And, a non-Christian administrator would have also valued this logic. At that point, I could have left his office and that could have ended the story. Not so with him, he looked me in the eye and said, “Merlin, I want you to go home and pray about it before you give me a decision.” Though I didn’t see my perspective changing, I did see the wisdom in praying so I agreed.

The next three days were spent wrestling with the Lord. Increasing my time with Him each morning still didn’t give me the familiar peace for which I longed. Finally, on the third day, while praying I was given an impression of what to tell the facility director. The much-needed peace then returned to my heart. The peace I long and search for each day. The next day found me in his office telling him these words, “The Lord has impressed me to tell you that you should advertise nationally for an experienced director and then interview all comers. At the end of that time, if you still feel like I am the one for the position I, with fear and trepidation, will accept it.”

The next three months were a blur of business interviews and lunch meetings. Many physicists with much more impressive resumes, more experience, and more letters behind their names visited our facility. I must say that it was strange to be interviewing those who would potentially become my boss. Each one that came increased my comfort that, in human logic, the director would see and act upon the wisdom in hiring anyone of these candidates. Well, he didn’t use human logic, he had been praying also and evidently his prayers were more powerful than mine. It wasn’t long after the three month period that I heard the words, “Merlin, I have followed your counsel to look seriously at other candidates before making a decision, but my conviction hasn’t changed. I believe the Lord has guided me to ask you to take the Director of Physics position.” Suddenly the reality of what had just been said, and the commitment I had made to accept the position, hit me!” When I experienced the rush of anxiety and adrenaline at my first ski

tournament it was as a fountain. Now, in comparison, it felt like Niagara Falls! True to my word, and clinging to the Lord, I took the position.

My commitment to never walk through the doors of any place where I work without praying for wisdom from God now became much deeper! For the next three years, the Lord would do things through me that I never dreamed possible. To Him be all the glory! With prayer, and much trepidation, I would often seek wisdom and He never failed to provide.

Little did I realize that some of the challenges in the supervision of those under my leadership would be equal or greater than the technical ones. With my lack of self-confidence, I have never considered myself to be a leader and I am very content to allow others to fill that role. But, since I knew God had called me to this position, I also knew He wanted me to do it with diligence. Over those three years I came to know the color and contour of the restroom floor quite well. I frequently spent time there on my knees just prior to my giving counsel and performance reviews.

At an exit interview with my one employee, I was thanked for my integrity in giving difficult but needed counsel that had been overlooked by previous supervisors. To say that the counsel was not accepted at the time it was given is an understatement. It was by God granting me wisdom that I had asked the administrative secretary to be present during one particular evaluation. If she had not, I believe the employee may have tried to turn the tables and taken unjustifiable legal recourse. By the power of God working through my prayers, the employee did eventually take the counsel to heart. She told me that it had a profound effect on her life, not only professionally but in personal life as well. When I dropped to my knees and begged for wisdom, the Lord never failed me. To Him be the glory!

Pleading for His Leading - 12

At this point in time, except for my absence during graduate school, I had been at the same facility for seventeen years. Having worked my way up the ladder, from therapist to the Physics Department Director and Vice-president, I had a very bright future from

a career perspective. This was a much-envied position for many in the medical physics community.

Over the years, in our “spare time”, the Lord had led us into a music and publishing ministry and they were growing significantly. With a wife, the two ministries, four kids and the correspondence Bible study school, I had very little time for new project development. I had been praying for several years for the Lord to provide me more time to focus on ministry.

With the passing of years, our oldest daughter, was now in 8th grade. Next to God, Vonda and I love each other and our children more than anything or anyone on this planet. With some maturing of our Christian experience and looking back at our high school years, we were deeply convicted of the extremely important influence of Christian schooling. Although we lived just ten minutes from the school that I had attended, we were convicted that this wasn't the place God would have us place our children.

Until now the thought of ever leaving our beautiful home, wonderful church, and my amazing job had never entered our minds. As the time for high school drew near, our conviction deepened for the need of change. We then began about a year long search for the right school. We knew we didn't want to send our children off to be in a dormitory to be raised by other teenagers, so we began to pray for God's will to be revealed about if and where we should move. The prayer of our hearts was, “Lord, take us wherever you know is best for us...” but, without realizing it, subconsciously we were saying, “...as long as it is in the southeast.” We had lived the first seventeen years of our marriage about fifteen hours from Vonda's family. Though I had kept my vow to take her and the family to visit every three months, she longed for the time she could be located closer to her family. I also assumed this would be a logical decision. The Scriptures say that God's thoughts are not our thoughts (Isaiah 55:8) and that He knows the beginning to the end (Isaiah 46:10). Little did we know what was in store.

Thus began our search for the ultimate school for our children. With Vonda becoming a wellknown Christian vocal artist, the Lord opened many doors where we were able to share her music and check out some schools at the same time. It became apparent later that these

opportunities were revealing to us what was important for us to look for in a school and what to avoid. We became convicted that the criteria of the right school were: it should be Christ centered, mission minded, and hold conservative values in the areas of dating, music, and media. We spent many months earnestly praying and searching. It seemed like our prayers were not going past the ceiling. An airplane with the banner, "This is the one!" never flew by. Our prayers and convictions that a change was needed continued to increase as the months passed.

I will not elaborate on the many details, but eventually God providentially put several people in our path pointing us to a school in the Northwest. Because of our unspoken conviction to move southeast, for a while we ignored the leading. Finally, at the point of desperation we called and had a discussion with the school's principal and it sounded like the perfect fit. My doubting mind said, *since you can't find a job as a medical physicist on every street corner, what are the chances of finding one near this school?* I thanked the principle for his time and told him that if I found any job prospects in the area, I would call and come by to check out the school.

There was only one radiation facility within an hour and a half of the school, so I did the logical thing. I called and asked the Human Resources person if there were any job openings for a medical physicist? I was told, "No." That week I had received a call from an agency that does job placement for those in radiation therapy professions, asking if I would consider a move. I called him back and said that we were and told him the area of the school. And boy did he go to work! This guy gave new meaning to the terms aggressive and thorough! Shortly he brainstormed the idea that I could consult for two long days a week in a city that was about two hours away. I would drive very early the first day, spend the night in a motel, get up and work another long day and head home. Since I had been praying for more time for publishing, this concept was appealing! As a consultant, I could make fulltime wages and then have the rest of the week to pursue the music and publishing ministries.

Next thing I knew, I was on a plane heading across the country for an interview. This went well, and I was offered the position. I drove the two hours and spent a day observing at the school. The visit confirmed the phone conversation that I had with the principal and it

was a perfect fit. Upon my arrival at home we quickly purchased tickets for the whole family to make the trip. The “impossible prayer” that we had prayed as a sign, was that our entire family of six would want to make the move. We knew this would be a minor miracle because the kids had lived in the same area all of their lives and loved their friends, church, and home.

When the week of our departure approached, I received a phone call from whom I thought would soon be my new employer. The physicist that I was setup to work with said, “Mr. Beerman, I am sorry to inform you that the administration has decided not to fill the position now due to budget limits.” My thoughts were, *Wow! Lord I am confused!* After a discussion with Vonda, we decided we would go ahead with the trip and the visit to the school. If God wants it to happen it will, if not it will just be a family vacation.

About two days before leaving on our journey, I felt a strong impression to contact the same clinic that was close to the school that had already said that they were not looking for physics coverage. This time I called and asked for the physicist instead of the Human Resource person. After I asked if they were looking for any help he replied, “I am sorry, as a matter of fact, we just filled a position last week.” My heart sank because this meant that six weeks before when I had called, they were looking for a physicist and, of all people, the Human Resource person I had spoken with was not aware of it. I recovered my composure and said that we were planning to be in the area, and asked if he could spare a few minutes to give me a tour of their facility. He graciously said yes, and we planned it.

The day arrived and our excited family boarded the plane for the Northwest. We checked into our motel and the next morning Vonda took all of the kids to check out the school. I went to visit with the physicist at the cancer center. We met and enjoyed our visit. He was very friendly as we discussed our experiences in the field and what the clinic was looking for. It was obvious that it would have been a great fit. Just before leaving he said, “I would really love to have you on board with me here, but I have already offered the position to another person and he has accepted. I don’t feel it would be right to yank the rug out from under him.” I agreed and said that I would not want him to do that, and it will work out for the best according to the Lord’s will.

That night we sat in the motel hot tub discussing our day. We ask the children what they thought. To our surprise one of our daughters said, "I felt the Holy Spirit and think maybe we should be here." The rest of the clan all agreed. Though that was a miraculous answer to prayer, we knew another major piece of the puzzle was my job and that still had to be worked out. That weekend we visited a local church and recognized two of the boys from the school. We visited with their family and they had us over for lunch and some site seeing. Their kindness was a blessing and we enjoyed the rest of our time there before heading back home.

With time being in the critical mode, the fervency of our prayers escalated exponentially! About two weeks later I received a phone call from the physicist at the cancer center. In a daze I heard him say, "Are you still interested in providing physics support here? The guy that I told you about has backed out of the position and taken one in the Midwest." We discussed the details a bit further before he hesitantly said, "There is just one problem. Administration will only let me hire a half-time position." I wasn't whether to be happy or sad? I had been praying for the Lord to provide a way for me to spend more time publishing and this would be a direct answer to that prayer. But, I also realized that the cost of living in the area we were considering in the Northwest was 24% higher than the area we were moving from and the average salary for a physicist was lower. If I worked half time, it seemed like it would be impossible to make it financially with our four kids in private school. I told him I would pray about it and get back to him.

A discussion soon followed, and Vonda and I were thinking, *Wow, this could actually happen!* For both of us this was both exciting and scary! For her it was dashing her dream of living closer to her parents. For me the thought of committing "career suicide" and all the financial challenges were very scary. The change of location was an exciting new adventure, but leaving our home and lives as we knew them was distressing. A quick flight back to the Northwest to interview with the physicians at the clinic confirmed God's leading—I was offered the job and accepted it.

Vonda and I began to pray, but the subject matter was different in our separate prayers. I was praying, "Lord, we have struggled for seventeen years to pay off our home and we now owe no man anything.

You are obviously moving us to the Northwest where the salary is likely less, the cost of living is higher, and the cost of housing is 2.5 times more than here. Lord, we have been faithful in our tithe and in Malachi you have promised that if we are faithful in our tithe you will open the storehouses of heaven and bless. I am claiming your promise and trust that you will work this all out.” If we sold our home the money would only be a down payment on a similar house where we are about to move to. Without God’s help, I saw no way to make a huge house payment and put our kids in a private Christian school on part-time wages.

A short time later, we heard major equipment clearing away the field next to our home. Upon further investigation, I found out that the city was putting in a huge school right next to our property. My first thoughts were, *if this were down the road a few blocks this would be a good thing, but with it is directly across the street. No one is going to want to live here.* In further contemplation, I realized that the city would be putting in a road, sidewalks, street lights, and utilities and all this would run parallel to my property. I approached the city to ask if a subdivision was an option. They said, “Absolutely not! That property is zoned agricultural, single family dwelling property.

A short-time later the city contacted me asking to talk. In our meeting they said that, due to technicalities in meeting the local code, they had to plant a certain number of trees per square foot of building. Since they had expanded the school to be an elementary, junior high, and high school, they didn’t have room on the property to put the needed trees. Since my property was neighboring theirs, would I consider allowing them to plant on the edge of my property. I told them we could possibly work that out if they would reconsider allowing me to subdivide. They eventually agreed and this was a huge answer to prayer. The gain from this would eventually be enough to have a home free from debt in the Northwest. And, instead of 2.75 acres and a 2,600 square foot home, we would eventually have 4.9 acres and a 3,232 square foot home PAID FOR!

God had heard my prayer, but Vonda was still praying. Despite all the huge signs, she was still praying for confirmation of God’s leading in this move. She prayed, “Lord, you know how fickle my feelings can be, I don’t want to get to the Northwest and, when times get rough,

doubt that you put us there. Can you please give me a sign like...”? She proceeded to list a few ideas that God could use to answer her prayer (as if He needed them!). Her last one was, “You could send someone to ask to by our house.”

A couple of evenings later, we were returning from a meeting for the kids at our church. As we drove up our driveway at about dusk, we saw a man walking around our yard. We parked and walked over and asked if we could help him in any way. He asked, “Would you be interested in selling your house?” Vonda spent the next five minutes trying to pick her bottom jaw up off the ground. I spent those five minutes explaining that he would not be interested in paying what we would be asking. God had done a miracle and opened the door that I could subdivide our 2.75 acres in to seven lots. He said, “Try me.” I gave him a number that was three times the current value of the property and he didn’t flinch as he said, “I think we can make that work.”

At this point the only thing this man had seen was our yard when it was practically dark outside. He had not been in our home or the outbuilding. With my head spinning from all the whirlwind of events, I escorted him into our house. As we passed through the garage he asked what all the boxes were. I explained that I had a small publishing ministry where I wrote and published Bible studies and these were cases of them.

Just as if a light came on, his countenance instantly changed. He said he was a pastor and had been driving by our house every day and praying for God’s leading. He found out about the school going in and was impressed that his large church should be built on part of this property and the house would be the parsonage. He felt the high traffic exposure would give good visibility to his church. He held an emergency board meeting with his leaders and, when Vonda and the kids boarded a plane a few weeks later, we had a sales contract in hand. God is good and Vonda’s prayer for a sign was answered!

Critical Mass or Career Meltdown? - 13

The time had arrived for Vonda and our kids to journey to the Northwest to begin a new chapter in our lives. I stayed behind for a month to finish my obligations at the cancer center. A large U-Haul and

trailer were rented and loaded for the journey. With me behind the wheel of the U-Haul and the trailer in tow and my father-in-law driving my old pickup pulling my aging boat, we made the 2,300-mile grueling drive across the country. The trip took about a week including the vehicle breakdowns. I will spare you the stories of those challenges. Meanwhile Vonda and the kids had arrived, rented a place, and began school.

I soon settled into the new job. The Lord had multiplied our finances through the subdividing of our land so that we were able to build a place in the Northwest and still stay out of debt. He also had blessed my financial situation at my new place of employment. I came to an agreement with the administrator of the new center that I would work twenty-five hours a week. In my two visits that consisted of a walk through and my interviews, I became aware that this was a busy clinic. Common sense told me that they would need more than my supervisor my halftime hours to cover the physics needs.

In the medical physics world, an algorithm is used to estimate staffing based on patient number, complexity of treatments, and other criteria. In this situation, we should have 3.5 to 4 physicists instead of 1.5. When they offered me to be salaried at half time, I let them know that it wasn't an option. Eventually they agreed to hire me as an hourly employee.

Since my hours were below the threshold to receive benefits, the administrator agreed to increase my hourly wage so that I would effectively receive a prorated benefit compensation. When the negotiations were final, it worked out that my take home pay was close to the same as in the previous place I had worked. The one negative difference was that compensation by the employer to my retirement fund was now supplementing my weekly check.

The positive difference was less stress. First, no beepers or being on call; second, I wasn't ultimately responsible for everything that happened from a physics perspective in three clinics; and third, I had no employees to supervise. I was now a part time "underling" and I loved it. What I had thought, and the world would consider, career suicide was the best blessing of my life! Now I could work for the Lord with more of my time and still have a sufficient income for our needs.

God is so good! As I am writing this testimony, I am still living this blessing today. Also, when I was hired my supervisor agreed to allow my work days to be midweek so that I could have freedom to travel on either side of the weekend for the ministry. This was another specific answer to prayer.

At my new place of employment, I was very blessed to work with many wonderful people. The manager I was under proved to be a brilliant physicist and loyal friend. By the grace of God, I had always tried to be very conscientious in my work. This amazing mentor would, over the eight years I worked with him, teach me the meaning of the word conscientious. This proved true when he later was recognized as “Physicist of the Year” over all the physicists in our 100-clinic network. God certainly blessed me to know and work with him and other wonderful medical professionals.

Over the discourse of the years that we worked together, we had but a few religiously oriented conversations. Because the Lord is the center of my life, it is natural for me to give Him praise and share the things He does in my life. Though I never really knew what he was thinking, he would smile and kindly listen. Though he was my superior in rank, intelligence, and experience, he was always a gentleman and treated me as a peer instead of a subordinate.

As I reflect, only a couple of two-sided conversations about spiritual things occurred. One day when I was about my tasks, he called me into his office. I entered with eager anticipation wondering the reason. He got a very serious look on his face and said, “Merlin, will you do me a favor? Will you pray for my mother? She is having a very serious neck operation tomorrow? I know you have a strong connection up there and I would really appreciate it.” I assured him that I would be praying for her. Retrospectively I wish I had thought to offer to pray with him for her, but I didn’t. Thank the Lord the surgery went well.

The second conversation was regarding the Sabbath. He was sitting at the treatment console of one of the machines. I don’t recall how the conversation started, but I remember that he wanted to know about my convictions about the Sabbath. I could tell from his questioning that he saw it, like most of the world does, as legalistic. I shared how the Sabbath is a gift of rest from God and what a blessing it

is! I shared about how it helped me keep my sanity through graduate school and that it still is a huge blessing in my life. I hope one day he will choose to experience this blessing.

When you love someone, it is not legalism to make them happy by obeying. Obedience is either the result of love or fear. In John 14:15 the Lord says, "If you love me keep my commandments." When my sweet wife who, does so much for me, asks me to spend a day with her, I do it because I love being in her presence and making her happy. It is the same with the Lord asking us to spend the Sabbath with Him. If you do it out of drudgery, it is legalism and you might as well not keep it at all! Unless you love being in His presence, you would miss the blessing anyway!

Several years after my date of hire the center finally hired some much needed help. A very intelligent, new physicist came on board. He eventually married one of the radiation therapists that also worked there. We enjoyed occasional outings with them and their continued friendship for several years that followed. I consider him to be my younger and more intelligent brother. I was blessed to share many spiritual conversations with him. Something rarely found in the very secular clinic where I worked.

After being on staff at the cancer clinic for two years, the local hospital invested in a Gamma Knife unit to perform a procedure called "Stereotactic Radiosurgery" on the brain. To perform this procedure requires a team of a neurosurgeon, radiation oncologist, medical physicist, and nurses. Since our clinic was the only place in the area that employed radiation oncologists and medical physicists the hospital negotiated with us to provide physics support as needed. My physicist supervisor and I rotated giving coverage.

The definition of Stereotactic Radiosurgery is the use of 3-D imaging and many precisely focused radiation beams to treat critically located intracranial lesions. This is done with submillimeter accuracy to a very conformal target volume using a single high dose treatment. Though typical lesions are also treated, it often is used in areas of the brain where the neurosurgeon's scalpel cannot safely reach.

A Gamma Knife unit resembles a CT scanner on the outside but differs greatly on the inside. There are 192 highly radioactive sources

that focus to deliver the gamma radiation to a precise location in the center of the machine. The Leksell Gamma Knife is the most accurate machine in the world to provide Stereotactic Radiosurgery with a 0.2-millimeter accuracy. Though the word “knife” is in the title, precisely aimed gamma beams are used and not a literal knife.

The procedure involves the attachment of a head frame to the patient’s skull with four screws. The patient then receives an MRI and the Images are imported into a treatment planning system. A treatment plan is generated by the neurosurgeon, radiation oncologist, and medical physicist. It is then exported to the treatment console and delivered to the patient.

I enjoy all aspects of medical physics, but this became my favorite. This one has a great balance between patient interaction and technical challenge. Our coverage for this procedure continued for six years. At the end of this time the hospital built another facility across town and, due to finances, shut down the existing center and elected not to have a Gamma Knife center in the new facility. This was very disappointing to all of us.

Many trials, challenges and blessings occurred over the next few years. The Christian school for our children was a great blessing. I continued half-time at the clinic and the rest of the time grow our ministries. The lead physicist was nearing retirement and the clinic was looking for a replacement. They offered the position to my colleague. I knew at this point in my career, I had been called to be more involved in the publishing ministry and less in the clinic. For the next few months we interviewed prospective candidates. We were all involved in the interview process and one was hired. The idea was for the lead physicist to pull back to part time for about a year during the transition period and phase in the leadership of the new gentleman. My misguided thoughts were that we would adequately be staffed for the next year.

One day, shortly after the clinic confirmed the hiring of the new physicist, I was called into the Clinical Administrator’s office. I was told that my position was going to be eliminated for budget reasons. Later it became apparent that they simply put the new physicist in the leadership position and then moved our former leader into the part-time position that I had occupied. This was done by upper level

management when the former leader was out of town. Retrospectively, if I had been given a choice, I would not have had it any other way. I am sure he would not have agreed to this, but he had no knowledge until after the fact. They were praising me for my performance, but at the same time showing me the door. They gave me a three-week notice. I was scheduled to go on a mission trip for the next two weeks so that left me a week in the clinic.

The clinic I worked at was full of many wonderful people, but unfortunately the environment was of a very secular mindset. I attempted to share the Lord at any opportunity I could, but I felt like I was walking a spiritual tightrope. On my last day in the clinic, I felt impressed to take a case of my **The Great Controversy Bible Study Guide**, write a personal note on the inside cover, and share one with each person there. My thoughts were, *what are they going to do, fire me?* I had been praying for years, and continue to pray, for everyone there. I know intercessory prayer works and I praise the Lord that it is making a difference.

Vonda and I spent time in discussion and prayer about our future. The option was to get on an airplane and job search. There are physics positions available, but you must go to them. The other option was to go into full-time ministry. Just months before we had finished building a 40' x 80' warehouse with offices for the ministry. God had miraculously provided, and we had paid off that project. We believed this was a sign that we should prayerfully pursue ministry until the Lord showed us otherwise.

Since I was let go from my job without a reason that was my fault, I could qualify for unemployment to help us manage while we figured life out. I spent days jumping through all the hoops and finally was at the point to collect it. To receive unemployment, you must turn in a report each week and list at least two new places you have applied. By signing the report you agree to take whatever job you can find. There was a slight problem with this, except for a urology clinic that had recently opened, there were no other places in town to apply. I had the choice to lie and collect unemployment at the highest level they pay, or I could tell the truth and not get a penny. Praise God He convicted me to do the right thing.

I went to the unemployment office to tell them my situation. The lady was a little stunned when I explained my dilemma and decision. As I was leaving she said, "Wait a minute, I know of another possibility." I was all ears! She said, "The state just started a program that encourages people who qualify for unemployment to start or grow small businesses. For a year, they will pay full unemployment benefits under a couple of conditions. First, you cannot seek any other employment. Second, you have to commit forty hours a week to the growth of your business." I explained that I had a small publishing business (it is of course a ministry but in the eyes of the state and IRS it is a small business) and asked if that would qualify and she said it would! Isn't God amazing! Now I was being told not to job hunt and they will pay me to do full time ministry. God is good! The unemployment lasted just long enough.

It Will Never Happen to Me - 14

Over time I had notice a strange color spot on my wife's back and said, "Vonda I really wish you would get that thing on your back checked out." At least a half dozen times over the next year she would continue to hear those words from me. I'm a medical physicist working with cancer every day and it didn't look dangerous to me, but it didn't look like your average mole either. "Honey, at my last yearly checkup the doctor said that, although he is not a dermatologist, he didn't think it was anything to worry about." She didn't say it verbally, but her attitude and actions revealed her thoughts, *it will never happen to me*.

Time passed and she was still alive, so I quit worrying about it. Then about a year later she had an irritating red mole on her leg that would get scraped by her clothing and bleed. She finally got tired of dealing with it and made an appointment with a dermatologist. The visit started out as expected, the physician's assistant chatted a bit and Vonda showed the mole on her leg and she removed it.

Just before the PA left the room, the mole that I had often bugged her about, came to Vonda's mind. "Would you mind taking a quick look at my back? My husband keeps bugging me to get something he sees back there checked out." She agreed and had Vonda lay on her stomach on the exam table. From that point forward the visit went south! "Just a minute Vonda, I want to get the doctor to join us." The

two of them returned shortly. After several minutes of staring at her back with a magnifying glass and whispering in the corner, the dreaded question came, “Do you have any history of Melanoma in your family?” Still donning her “it will never happen to me” mindset, she said she wasn’t aware of any. The doctor left and the PA said, “It’s probably nothing but to be sure we should take it off. I just happen to have time so let’s go ahead and do it now!” Vonda wasn’t excited to have a chunk of tissue whittled from her back, but she agreed to the procedure. The excisional biopsy was taken, and Vonda left with the news that it would take 4-5 days to get the results and then they would call.

As I heard the details that evening my stomach dropped to my feet. Almost weekly at work I treat patients with Melanoma metastasis to the brain. I knew that, if not caught early and still in the epidermis (upper layer of the skin), Melanoma is often a merciless killer. Without treatment intervention the average survival in patients with brain metastasis from this disease only live a matter of months or even weeks. To escalate my fears, I knew this lesion was relatively large and for the past few months she had been bumping into furniture and walls—often a symptom of a brain tumor.

For the next few days I experienced what the families of my patients do. The deep pit-in-the-stomach feeling that haunts you relentlessly. You go through the day trying to ignore it, but it never lets up. After lying down and finally falling to asleep, you wake in the wee hours of the morning startled. Once you get your bearings you realize it is not a nightmare, this is really happening.

For the next four days Vonda went cheerfully about her daily tasks still donning her, “it will never happen to me” mindset. I spent these four days trying to picture what it would be like raising our family and carrying on life without her. I wish I could say that my faith was invincible and that I had put her in God’s hands, but that wasn’t the case. I can say that many prayers went up to heaven on her behalf.

Vonda and I have a very beautiful marriage and share a wonderful full disclosure intimacy, but in this experience I felt alone. She did not know what I knew. She had not seen or experienced the things related to Melanoma that I had for fifteen years. Even if I could

get her out of the “it will never happen to me” mindset, I knew it would not change things and it would only terrify her in the process.

Days later, while I was at work, the call came, “Mr. Beerman, this is the physician’s assistant at the dermatology clinic. I am sure you are aware that your wife had a skin biopsy last week. She asked me to call you when the results came because you would better understand what I was talking about. I am sorry to say that it is melanoma, but...”

My worst nightmare had been confirmed, and my mind was rattled! I silently prayed, *Lord God in heaven, this can't be true! Please say it's not true!* Now the tables had turned and I was in denial--*Lord, surely this would never happen to us!*

“Mr. Beerman, are you there?” Her words brought me back to the conversation at hand. “She just needs to come in and let us take out an extra centimeter of tissue around the area to be safe. The lesion was shallow; she is going to be fine.” *Sure*, I thought, *you don't know what I know, she has been bouncing off walls for months.* I gained my composure enough to tell her I would have Vonda call her to make an appointment.

The end of my workday was close and, with my work done, I left on the long trip home. How do you tell your soulmate and the woman of your dreams that she has a deadly cancer? Now my test of faith came, would I place Vonda in the hands of our Creator and my best Friend and trust Him, or would I choose stress and worry over the peace I knew He would give. The answer would depend on the moment.

A constant battle raged, I would surrender her to the Lord’s will and moments later catch myself in anxious thoughts about it again. My faith did grow as the experience played out. Why does it often take the worst that life can offer before we seek the One who longs to be our Peace always? Though my faith was weak, I did know Him well enough to know that He was the answer to our trial and would give peace no matter the outcome.

Vonda took the news with the same mindset she had all along, but agreed to have the additional tissue removed. The appointment was scheduled for about a week and a half later. Vonda remembered that we had a friend who is a nurse. She worked in an outpatient surgery

clinic for a well-known surgeon that often works with melanoma patients. Vonda called to just to get her opinion of our situation. This friend called back a few minutes later and said we had an appointment for the next morning. It normally takes weeks or month to see this highly reputable surgeon, she had played her trump card and we had an appointment the next day for the surgery.

We were leaving the day after that for a trip to Oklahoma for our music ministry. And about ten days later, we were scheduled to leave for Peru on a mission trip. The Lord is merciful! He worked it out that we could not only get peace of mind, but also the surgery done soon enough so that the stitches could be removed just before leaving for Peru. Being a scientist, the natural thing for me to do was research the issue for myself. I spent that evening and the next morning doing just that! I had articles printed and books highlighted ready for our appointment. Everything I read confirmed that the prognosis is bleak once melanoma has spread to the brain and I still believed this was the case.

We entered the surgeon's office and he spent the next hour trying to convince me that she was fine. Finally he said, "If she has been bumping into walls for months, and this was due to melanoma brain metastasis, without treatment she would likely be dead already." Now there was some logic that I hadn't considered, and it struck a note of hope in me!

He also pulled out a large picture which was a cut away section of tissue and explained that the epidermis is about 1mm thick. If a melanoma is caught without breaking through into the lower layer of skin called the dermis, the prognosis is excellent. If a lesion gets into the dermis the chances of it spreading are much higher because of the lymphatics and vasculature that is prevalent in that layer. Though her lesion was large, it had grown out instead of down. Considering the different factors that were determined by the biopsy, her chance of five-year survival was 98%. I praised the Lord! The world had just been lifted off our shoulders! We were able to travel that weekend and they removed her stiches the day before leaving for Peru. God is good!

Evidently my obvious fear subconsciously affected the surgeon. Instead of removing tissue the size of a quarter, which is standard

protocol, he whittled a chunk of tissue out of her back the size of a medium avocado. The incision was about 3 inches long, but that was okay with me, the more the better! It is better to be sore, have a scar and be safe than to be sorry!

Ironically, on the flight to Peru we sat next to a young lady and the melanoma experience, still fresh on our minds, came into the discussion. The girl described the lesion on her dad's back that resulted in his death at the age of forty. She described one of his symptoms—"bumping into walls." Vonda turned to me with a pale look and said, "Now I get it."

It has been about five years since her diagnosis and her frequent examinations have been clear. We thank the Lord often for her survival. Retrospectively, I see how God used this experience to place a deep-rooted compassion and empathy in my heart for those who were not as lucky as she was. I was soon to be called on to exercise this compassion in a special way.

The Call - 15

All kinds of thoughts whirled through my head. ***Lord Jesus, what is this world coming to? The head of religious services in a "Christian" hospital has a Ouija board on his desk and a Ph.D. in philosophy behind his name! It will be a miracle if he says I can openly share my faith and pray with the patients. I wonder if he is going to ask this thing whether to hire me or not?***

One spring afternoon a year after being "let go" from the clinic I received an unexpected phone message. The call was from the administrator of the hospital where I had consulted on behalf of the clinic. The gamma knife department had been closed about six months before I was laid off at the clinic. Curious as to what the call may be about I called back. "We have elected to establish a new Gamma Knife center in the new hospital across town. We would like to hire you to give the medical physics coverage."

I was in shock! My emotions were suddenly scrambled; I wasn't sure whether to be elated or depressed! During the last six years of working at the clinic, I had often thought and prayed about spending my twenty hours a week doing only Gamma Knife treatments. Now that

prayer seemed to be becoming true. But, in my opinion, the problem was that the answer was coming years too late! Now I was doing full-time ministry and couldn't imagine changing. We could not have been more blessed to be traveling every weekend and sharing our love for the Lord in music and through our publishing materials.

"Hello Mr. Beerman, are you still there?" The Administrator's voice brought me back to reality. Still not knowing how to react, I simply muttered, "I will need some time to think and pray about this?" She graciously agreed and we set up a time to meet for a discussion about the details and tour the area where the new department would be located.

Each morning my habit was to hike a couple of miles up the mountain next to our home. I had a Bible stashed in an old enclosed excavator located in the rock quarry at the top. I would hike up for my exercise, and then have my time with the Lord in prayer and Bible study. This mountain top has a 360-degree view, for what seems like, a hundred miles. In one direction is a snow-capped mountain and the others beautiful valleys, lakes and rivers.

This personal sanctuary was usually my paradise of peace, but not so now! For the next three days, if you were one of the animals close by, you would have heard me often repeat, "Really Lord! Surely this isn't from You!" Like Jacob, I was determined to wrestle with God until He blessed me with an answer. As you can tell from the past chapters, I am a slow learner, but somehow from my previous experiences I finally got it--His ways are not my ways and His ways always turn out better! There is no greater blessing than walking in His will.

Finally, I submitted and was emptied of self, I sincerely asked for His will to be done whatever that may be. Finally, the peace that had eluded me for the past three days had returned. In the recesses of my mind I heard, "Merlin, wherever you are planted, I have called you to be a minister for Me" (1 Peter 4:10). As I pondered this thought the eight years at the clinic came to my mind. How I felt my hands were tied every time I attempted to share the gospel. *Okay Lord, I thought, this is the answer. If I can openly share my faith by ministering spiritually as well as physically, then that's my sign I should be there. If this is not*

allowed, then I will continue with the full-time music and publishing ministry.

In the days before meeting with the administrator, I prayed for wisdom and compiled a proposal letter. The time came and I sat down across from her desk and handed her my letter. I said a silent prayer for the Holy Spirit to guide my words, and then began. Respectfully, I told her that they had called me, I hadn't called them. I was perfectly happy in the publishing work that I was doing; but, my life is fully in the Lord's hands. I didn't want to close the door, if He was leading me here. In no uncertain terms I also said, ***"I am not going to lie to you or deny my Lord, if you hire me, here is what you get. I will share my faith with the patients at any opportunity that I can ... and if they show a desire, I will pray with them."***

From her reaction, I don't think she had heard those words in any previous interviews. After a long thoughtful silence, she finally said, "I I I... think that fits our mission." More silence, and then she said, "If you don't mind discussing that with the head of social and cultural services, I will set you up with an appointment." I said, "that would be great!" and the appointment was made. A day later I sat down with this person and we had the same discussion with basically the same outcome. She wanted me to have the same discussion with the Director of Missions and Religious Services who is the leader of all the hospital chaplains. My reply was the same.

A couple of days later, I knocked on the office door of the Director of Missions and Religious Services. As I entered his office I noticed his credentials on the wall, a Ph.D. in philosophy. This surprised me because usually religion and philosophy are direct opponents in their beliefs. The next thing I saw shocked me even more, on his desk was a Ouija board! After picking my bottom jaw off the floor, I stammered, "What's that?" His response was, "Oh, that just a kickback from the 70'S. Each morning I ask it questions and it gives me answers."

For those of you who may not be familiar with this device, here is the definition, "a board printed with letters, numbers, and other signs, to which a planchette or movable indicator points, supposedly in answer to questions from people at a seance." In

simple terms, it is a tool used in the realm of spiritualism to communicate with satanic forces.

I quickly changed the subject with him to the reason that I had been sent to see him. As I spoke my mind lingered on what lay before me on his desk. I knew that both philosophy and communications with the spirits were in direct opposition to Christianity. Then the conviction came, and I shot a prayer to heaven, "Okay Lord, if I leave this office with his permission to share You with the patients and pray with them, then I know I am supposed to be here." Thirty minutes later that is exactly what happened!

The Healing Mission of Jesus Christ – 16

The mission statement for the organization at which I accepted my new position was, "To carry on the healing mission of Jesus Christ." Though I do not agree with the doctrinal beliefs of this organization, I certainly do agree with their mission statement. Since that day on the mountain when I heard God's clear calling, He has put a passion in my heart to carry on this mission with the patients in the Gamma Knife Center.

Even in the medical and scientific communities, it is a recognized fact that health is not just physical, it also includes other areas of our total being. This was substantiated and modeled by the healing ministry of Christ. He ministered to the physical, mental, social and spiritual needs. I had no doubt that God had called me to minister in a special way to the patients under my care. I knew this involved demonstrating extra compassion to help relieve the anxiety of the approaching procedure. I also knew God had called me to go beyond this into the spiritual realm and, if they were receptive, to pray with them. I had, through conviction, animatedly voiced this intension to the hospital administration. But, because of fear of the unknown, the practice of the concept still needed time to percolate in my mind! Because of my training in secular institutions, and my previous experience in the medical field, a paradigm shift in my mind would be required. This time was provided during the months that it took for the construction and my physics preparation, of the department to be completed.

Praying with someone in a medical setting was uncharted territory for me. Never in my career had I witnessed any medical professional pray with a patient. Especially not a physicist--those who by nature and reputation, are not considered to be “spiritual” people. Nobody I knew in this profession modeled it, nor had any text books I had read discussed it. The field of medicine, and especially science, is dominated by secular evolutionary beliefs, and spiritual matters are taboo.

Most Caregivers want to minister to the physical needs of the patient as they are trained. Unfortunately, even the ones with a bent towards spiritual matters, consider issues of faith as something restricted to the family circle or church on the weekend. It is as though those paid to help the body heal are supposed to be above spirituality.

Doctors, scientists, and other caregivers are people of facts based on published papers. They are highly trained and self-confident to heal the body using institutional protocols. If someone had spiritual convictions, it seems like an unspoken rule that these convictions are to be kept strictly outside the boundaries in which we function and are considered “unprofessional.” This mentality has, for many in the medical realm, led to arrogance.

With these thoughts looming in my mind, I had no idea what this endeavor would look like. What would be my approach? What would be their reaction? If they said no, how would I act after making myself so vulnerable? Would they react in the same way I did when I saw the Ouija board on the Director of the Chaplains desk? If I prayed with them, I would be putting my pride, reputation, professional relationships, and my employment on the line.

With this very specialized procedure, and because of the limited population of our area, we only treat one to four patients on a treatment day, with the average being two. Our team consists of a nurse for each patient, a neurosurgeon, a radiation oncologist, and a medical physicist. We each have our roles to perform, at times our functions overlap and at times there are gaps.

Part of the procedure requires the mounting of a stereotactic frame to the patient’s skull by four screws. This sounds barbaric, but is relative painless due to the blessing of local anesthesia. However, it is

serious enough that we don't want to put the patient through the mounting of the frame without first making sure the machine is functioning properly. Therefore, I show up about an hour and a half before the neurosurgeon and do a thorough quality assurance testing. When I am through with testing, there is often about a thirty-minute time before the neurosurgeon arrives. The nurses have applied IV's, medications and local anesthetics and are scurrying about. This is my God-given opportunity to "Carry on the healing mission of Jesus Christ" in a spiritual way.

I could not deny that God had called me to do this and the moment of truth had finally arrived. I don't recall all the details of that first encounter. I do know the world did not end. The religious Gestapo was not standing at the door. There was no one armed with strait-jackets and handcuffs ready to take me to a concentration camp for religious zealots! Something wonderful happened that brought peace to all who were present.

Whether from a malignant or a non-malignant condition, Gamma Knife treatment brings hope of relief from symptoms and for healing; but to lay hold of that hope, the patients, and the families that usually come to support them, must go through a stressful time. Prior to the treatment day, most patients and family members have read brochures and seen videos about what to expect during the procedure. In some respects, this helps relieve their anxiety, but, after they see the eminent reality that they will have four screws attached to their skull, their anticipation is often greatly escalated. My prayer each day is that God uses me to be a source of peace, comfort, and hope for them.

A typical encounter with a patient goes something like this. I introduce myself as the physicist responsible for the technical aspects of the procedure. I give a brief overview of what will happen and I ask if I can answer any questions. I sit in a chair next to the family and across from the patient and begin to get to know them. I ask where they are from, about their spouses, families, and grandchildren. I ask what they do, or did, for a living and what their interests are. Once they see that I genuinely care, the barriers begin to melt away. This also diverts their minds from the stress of what will happen in the next few minutes and much anxiety is relieved. Even if I am not able to connect on a spiritual level, I know God has used me to help relieve their anxiety.

Vonda and I travel most weekends sharing her music and most of the time we have visited a patient's home town. Often this provides an icebreaker for spiritual things. If we have visited there, I will tell them my wife is a Christian concert artist and that we have been blessed to be in their area. Somewhere in the conversation I will tell them, "I am so sorry you are going through this crisis. I don't know if you are a believer or not, but I am and I want you to know that this morning I began to pray for you. Before walking through these doors, I have asked God to grant every member of our team wisdom and bless our abilities that you may receive the best treatment possible. I pray that He will bless our human efforts with success for your healing." I explain to them that, "We are just instruments God uses. All healing comes, whether through His touch or through modern medicine, from Him."

Their reaction to this gives me direction on where to guide the conversation. If there is an interest in spiritual things their faces will light up. If not, some will politely thank me, but you can tell they are uncomfortable with the situation. Rarely there is resistance and an obvious hostility towards God. In both of these scenarios, I change topic back to our ordinary chit chat. I don't offer prayer to any patient if I sense that it will not be a blessing for them.

If they did respond positively then, when the time is right, I put my hand on their shoulder or arm and look them in the eye and say, "Would you be offended if I prayed right now for you?" I make myself vulnerable and I make it a point in my words and demeanor to give them a clear path to opt out if they prefer. If they are receptive, we share a special moment of prayer and the peace it brings. If they do refuse, I try to make sure they know that I did not mean to make them uncomfortable. Then I move right along to another topic. In my experience, even in this extremely secular area, I am blessed to have the privilege to pray with about half of the patients.

Sometimes, before I can finish asking, the family jumps to my side and grabs my hands to form a circle. Often family members will catch me in the hall and profusely thank me for caring enough to pray with them. They say how much it has meant, often with tears in their eyes. Some will take time later to send cards and letters with special thanks for the prayer needed at just the right moment in their lives. Most patients give a response showing appreciation, with others, their

eyes will mist up and they will simply nod. At times, both men and women have wept openly.

It doesn't always go as planned. Over the past three years, a couple of patients gave a definite negative response. In one case, I evidently stepped over the gray line. One lady accepted my offer to pray with her and then later when the nursing manager contacted her with a follow-up call, she complained, "Who was the guy pushing God on me!" I am blessed with a Christian manager who didn't get alarmed and has seen and heard so many positive responses. Although these negative responses are rare, I am learning how to handle it. I have chosen not to let a less than 1% negative response keep the other 99% of the patients from being blessed.

Other than an occasional card or letter, I don't get feedback to know if our short time of connecting has made a difference in their lives. There is no ethical way to follow up for medical reasons from a physicist perspective. I am just given the privilege to plant a seed or maybe water an existing one along their journey. Hopefully, I have given them comfort in a moment of major stress in their lives and pointed them to the Source of healing and hope. I cling to the conviction that the Lord wouldn't have called me to do this with fruitless results. One day in heaven the stories will be told and to God will be given the glory.

Approximately one out of three of our Gamma Knife cases are of a curative nature. We are blessed to bring relief from pain and many times cure the issue at hand. On the other two out of three of our cases we are treating 4th stage cancer that has spread from another site to the brain. In these cases, it is rare that our intervention will result in cure. Stereotactic radiosurgery is a localized treatment to specific targets. We are privileged to, by the grace of the Lord, relieve pain and other symptoms and add time and quality of life. Unfortunately, it is often that new lesions grow and eventually overcome their immune system. Unless the Lord intervenes with a miracle, the inevitable will happen.

True to my promise that I make in my visit with them, I continue to keep them in my prayers. Over time, the nature of my prayer has changed. It used to be a desperate plea for physical healing, which at times, there is evidence He has answered. Now I pray a prayer, first asking for strength, peace, and spiritual healing, then I ask for healing in

every other aspect of their lives as He sees is best. My plea of intercession is that those who aren't granted the miracle of physical healing to not pass away until they have come to Know Jesus---the One who longs to give them a future with no more pain, suffering and death.

God is not arbitrary in His decisions to heal or not to heal. He is more concerned with our eternal life than with the flash of time we live on this earth. If, in His infinite wisdom, He sees that what seems like a disaster to us can ultimately save us or others in His kingdom, then that is what He will allow. Our part in this life's journey is to learn to trust Him implicitly and ask that His will be done in our lives. We are to trust His promise to work all things out for our good. Our part as Christians is to be the hands and feet to carry the hope of a better existence with Him to others.

I cannot express what a blessing it is to be able to make a difference in the lives of hurting people. And, no matter what our sphere of influence, they are all around us. Right where God has called you, I want to encourage you to pray for the Lord to use you in this way. Pray that He will give you the courage and faith to step out to be the minister God has called you to be.

Memorable Patient Encounters - 17

I wish that at the onset of my ministry at the Gamma Knife Center I would have started journaling the many amazing experiences that I have been blessed to have. Upon the writing of this book, I have gone back and journaled a few of the most memorable cases. It is my prayer that you will be inspired to reach out and minister in whatever way God leads you.

Inspired by the Nature Lovers

Kathy and Mitch, what a privilege it was to meet this amazing couple. Before I made it into the room they had already connected with my outdoor-loving coworker. Glowing with enthusiasm for the outdoors, they described their life journey. Kathy and Mitch met while both were working as guides for whitewater rafting tours on the beautiful rivers of Alaska. They mesmerized us for an hour with their truelife adventure stories of fish, elk, bear, and other creatures that they encountered daily. Kathy snickered as she described Mitch chasing

a bear off their front porch, in the middle of the night, in his birthday suit, with shotgun in hand. With gleaming eyes, revealing their great passion, they planted a desire in our hearts to experience the wilds of Alaska.

Kathy told of her continued active lifestyle and how, despite her brain tumor, she had run a ten-kilometer race with her eighty-one-year-old father who is still not only an active runner but pole vaults with her! What an amazing heritage is that? She described how she juices, exercises, meditates, and is doing all she can to stay on earth to mother her children. She described her daily ritual of loading the girls up in a wagon and giving them a ride to school a few blocks down the road from their home. My heart ached as I saw the pain in her eyes as she mentioned not wanting to leave her children without a mother.

Mitch is carrying on the family tradition as a tour guide for river rafting in the mountainous area in which they now live. His passion, ingenuity, and persistence convinced the local city administration to allow him to fulfill his dream to provide his services for the handicapped. Now many physically and mentally handicapped people can experience an exciting rafting experience who, most likely, would never have otherwise had the opportunity. In the winter, he is a member of the rescue team for injured skiers on the slopes of the mountains he loves.

They described their beautiful six and nine-year-old daughters waiting for them at home. The purpose of their trip to our city today was twofold. First, the treatment of forty-two-year-old Kathy's brain tumors and second, to pick up two kittens for the girls before making the three-hour trip home. Kathy proudly described her nine-year-old daughter's brilliant and successful scheme to convince her parents to allow these pets.

She wrote an amazing research paper with the skill of a scientist. In it she laid out the benefits of owning such creatures, the excellent care they would receive, and reasons for her request. How could a loving parent refuse? I was so impressed that I told her she needed to allow her to come and spend some time with me and I would turn this aspiring young researcher into a fine medical physicist.

As the conversation continued, I attempted to interject spiritual matters into our conversation, without much success. From the surface, it seemed that they unfortunately didn't know God, the One who created the gift of the amazing outdoors that they so passionately love. As the treatment process ended and they were leaving, I felt a stronger than usual attachment to them, thus fueling my commitment of holding them up in prayer. As I do for all those we treat, I prayed for God's full intervention in the lives of Kathy and her family. This is for spiritual, emotional, and physical healing according to His will.

Unfortunately, Kathy would become a "frequent flier." Kathy returned four months later with two more brain tumors. I was encouraged to observe an increased spiritual awareness and hunger. Because gamma knife is a highly localized treatment, and brain cancer is a nasty disease, more lesions popping up are expected in other parts of the brain, the only question is the timing. Still in strong spirits and determined to live life to the fullest, she gave a continued account of her efforts to stay healthy. This time Mitch stayed with the girls and a friend brought her the three-hour trip for this second gamma knife treatment.

This was a bittersweet encounter. It was good to see her, but such a sad circumstance. She filled us in on the status of the kids, cats, and Mitch. Their hope was still strong and optimistic despite the dismal situation. I breathed a prayer asking the Lord to provide an opportunity for me to share hope with Kathy. She readily engaged the subject and told me about the small amount of exposure she had with "religion." She expressed that she was exploring in this area and that she had connected with a "spiritual instructor" and was experiencing amazing things. Unfortunately, she was being taught to worship creations instead of the Great God who created all things. I asked if I could pray with her and she was very anxious to do so.

I spent a few minutes describing heaven, the fall of mankind, the consequences of sin, the big picture of the great controversy, and most importantly our hope in Christ. She listened intently and was receptive to the CD and brochure I shared that contained a gospel presentation and the address of spiritual materials that are located on my web site. With many well wishes and goodbyes, they left for home.

Our next contact would be a couple of months later. Usually I am not the one answering the phone, but by divine appointment, I did that day. I recognized the energized “Hi Merlin” on the other end of the line. We visited briefly before she described her urgent need to have images from her last MRI done with us sent to her Neurologist. Tumors had formed in the lining of the spine and brain which often is indicative of a quick and fatal struggle with the reoccurring disease.

Typically, it would not be appropriate for me to contact her outside of my professional interaction, but due to the urgent need to meet her request, she gave me her phone number and asked me to text her after the images were sent. I did this, and she was very appreciative of me going the extra mile to help her. She that she greatly appreciated my prayers. She thanked me for the love that everyone at our center had shown her. I sensed the gravity and sincerity of her message.

After numerous spinal taps she excitedly texted me weeks later to thank me for my prayers and to share the news that she did not have any evidence of disease in the spinal fluid they had taken. This was a very encouraging victory in one battle of the many in the war for her life. She mentioned that she was going to Europe for “alternative treatment methods.” Unfortunately, she had to go by herself due to the finances. She told me the web address of a blog she was posting for her friends and family concerning her trip, spiritual journey and struggle for life.

As I read the blog my admiration and prayers grew in strength for Kathy and her family. Her depth of thought, love for life, and her unwavering courage were a tremendous inspiration to me. Life is not fair, sin is not fair, and cancer is not fair as it drains the life out of countless people without mercy. I am so thankful for the promise of Jesus to one day return and take us home with Him where there will be no more cancer, suffering and pain.

The last I heard, Kathy presented with fifteen more lesions and had taken the logical option of having whole brain radiation therapy at her local cancer center. My prayer is for her and her family to know Jesus. I thank God and feel blessed to have known them and I pray that God has used me to make a difference in their lives. I will continue to lift them before God’s throne in prayer. My dream is to see them in heaven

one day and to see the look of enthusiasm as they experience what nature was originally created like in the Garden of Eden.

Moved to Tears

JoAnn was a patient with brain metastasis from breast cancer. I introduced myself and spent some time getting to know a little bit about her and her family. When I mentioned that I had prayed for her that morning, she began to quietly weep. When I asked if I could pray with her and her husband she began to openly cry. We shared a special moment of comradery in the journey as I shared about my wife's experience with melanoma. I also shared that today my wife would be having a biopsy for a lesion in her breast later today (thank God it came back benign). They were very concerned, so together, we prayed for her also. JoAnn left with the blessing of peace on her lips and in her countenance. Praise the Lord!

The Record No One Wants

I was blessed to meet Merilee. Although she had been verbally abusive over the phone to the staff who arranged her treatment, now she was very patient and kind. I had the privilege of visiting with her and the paid caregiver who brought her. As I asked questions to get to connect with her, my heart ached as she explained that she has no family and lives alone. Her entire world is centered around her dogs. She almost elected not to come for treatment because she was so worried about leaving them. Like a proud parent bragging about her children, she beamed as she told me about each one. It breaks my heart that she is dying in loneliness and no one seems to notice.

Several times she asked, "Is it curtains for me?" I tried to encourage her and give her spiritual hope. In this situation, I was glad to be the medical physicist and not the medical doctor because I could dodge her uncomfortable question. I turned the conversation toward spiritual things to see if she desired to go there. She did, and I saw a spark of hope in her eyes as I shared Jesus with her. As our time together closed, I placed my hand on her shoulder and told her of my prayers for her and promised they would continue. She never acknowledged to be a Christian, but by the tears in her eyes, I sensed that a heart-cord was touched and that she might be open to seek this path. The atmosphere of fear melted away as we prayed together.

Merilee is one of a countless number grasping for any glimpse of hope in this sin-sick world. My prayer is, "Lord, please help me to slow down in this journey of life to listen more often to those in need of compassion. Empower me to share hope with those desperately searching for it." Unfortunately for Merilee that day she became the new record holder, a record no one wants to own. We treated twenty-six brain tumors. It was a long day for all of us, but especially for her. I know she was in tremendous pain lying on the treatment table for hours but didn't complain.

She was escorted from the table to get the head frame removed and her long-awaited meal. I was able to break away from my tasks to share one of my wife's CD's with her. I encouraged her to listen to the messages of comfort and hope. Her long day with us came to an end and she and her driver left. A few weeks later I received from Merilee a personal thank you card for my time and encouragement. She also sent a card commending the entire staff for a "wonderful experience." What a paradigm shift to think that someone could receive treatment for twenty-six brain tumors and call it a wonderful experience! Praise God and all the glory goes to Him! I am privileged to work with a group of wonderful and compassionate people.

It's a Small World

Randy was a patient with a condition of malformation of a series of vessels in his head. Though it is not a malignancy, it can be life threatening and cause painful symptoms. When I walked in the door I first saw Randy, then I turned to meet his wife. As soon as I saw her I said, "Where do I know you from?" She looked at my badge and recognized my last name and said, "Do you know Vonda Beerman?" They attend one of the local churches and were brought into the church by a Bible worker who is our next-door neighbor. Vonda had shared music at that church in the past and she recognized her name.

This of course widely opened the door to share and pray with them. They were very appreciative to have the spiritual ministering as well as the physical. I shared that I had begun to pray for his healing and would continue to do so. He was in terrible pain from a migraine headache even while we spoke. I shared a CD with them before they left. It is never comforting to see any patient, of any age, in our

department for treatment, but my heart especially goes out to the young.

She Beat Me to the Draw

I entered the room to meet Alice. She was much more at ease about the situation than her daughter and granddaughter. They were concerned about her treatment and had come from a neighboring state to be with her. We were treating a very large tumor, an acoustic neuroma, that was impinging upon her brain stem. After some chit-chat, they relaxed and we were able to enjoy each other's company.

Just as I was about to mention that I had prayed for her, she mentioned prayer. This opened wide the door for a spiritual conversation. The whole demeanor of the room changed as I asked if I could have the privilege of praying with them and they readily agreed. We gathered around her and had a blessed time of prayer and I specifically prayed for the success of our mission because I knew it would be a technological challenge. I did not mention my concern, but the likely scenario would be that we would have to treat the side of the tumor that was pushing on the brainstem with a lesser dose to spare her from complications. Unfortunately, this would leave the door open for a possible reoccurrence.

God miraculously answered my prayers and the planning went extremely well. We were able to deliver the full dose despite the submillimeter proximity of the brain stem! This is when the Gamma Knife unit, the most accurate machine in the world to do intracranial radiosurgery with, is the most valuable. Overdosing close structures can cause paralysis, blindness, or even death and that is why we must rely on its extreme accuracy.

At times, my partners in planning, the neurosurgeon and the radiation oncologist, are even amazed at what we can accomplish. It can only be explained by giving credit to God for answering the prayer I always pray before coming through the door. My prayer is that one day they will realize and acknowledge that all wisdom, and especially the wisdom that allows us to successfully treat these cases, comes from God.

As Alice was about to enter the treatment room, we asked if she wanted music and she said, “gospel music”! That was my chance, I grabbed my phone and called up Vonda’s latest CD and played it through the built-in stereo system for her. After the treatment, she said how blessed she was. As they were about to leave I gave my wife’s CD to and she was very excited. I mentioned that she could also watch Vonda’s music videos on youtube.com. I told her about a television station that Vonda often records for and that I posted some of her videos. She said, “Oh, I watch that channel all the time on Direct TV” and I said, “Then you have likely seen Vonda sing because she is seen on that channel often!” God is amazing! It is a small world. As we departed they thanked me for praying with them and expressed their appreciation. What a privilege!!

Lord, Give me the Heart of a Servant!

On this particular morning, as I walked through the reception office, our department manager expressed his anxiety about getting the help he needs in the preparation process for the patients. He recently took on a full-time nursing manager position of the neurology floor, but still chose to manage the Gamma Knife department as well. He has great bedside manner and enjoys the patient contact here, but realizes he can’t be in two places at once. He has attempted to train another nurse to fill in where needed, but due to personal circumstances, her availability is limited. He began by hinting around at my involvement. My first pride-filled thought was, “Are you serious, you are going to pay me ten times what you pay an office assistant to do these remedial tasks? I am a physicist, not a secretary.” Then the Holy Spirit convicted me and I offered, “I am glad do whatever I can to help out.”

In my slowness of mind, I had not yet realized the opportunity that the Lord was providing. He opened my blind eyes an hour later. I received a call from the Oncologist saying she could not get ahold of Nick and was wanting to send a patient over for a tour. I told her to go ahead and send her over and I would be glad to give her a tour. The doctor said, “Are you sure you have time, I thought you would be doing all your important physics tasks.” Of course, in pride, I blurted out that “I would still be doing all those things, but could work her in.” After her visit, I would finally wake up to the reality that God had opened the door for me to have some uninterrupted, one-on-one time with the

patient and her family to connect with, minister to, and pray for them!



On gamma knife morning, the Lord often works out the logistics where I can connect with at least one and sometimes two, but if there are three or more patients, it is almost impossible to connect with them all. What I had considered just office duties that were not part of my job description, had turned out to be a blessing and a door God opened for me to freely minister to the ones I may not be able to connect with on treatment day morning!

The Frequent Flier Miles You Really Don't Want

I walked through the doors of the gamma knife unit to find a surprise “add on” to our patient schedule for the day. This had never happened due to all the red tape with insurance companies, and difficulty of coordination of schedules with the neurosurgeon and radiation oncologist, but it happened today. My heart was heavy, it was Jenise and Carl, a young couple back for the third time. She had worked many years for a friend of ours who is a dentist. She is thirty-one year old with melanoma metastasis to the brain. Despite the dismal outlook for her future, she pursued and finished dental hygiene school while dealing with this trauma.

On their first visit, I had quite a bit of time with them and we had strongly connected. I was able to pray with them and this seemed to be very comforting to them both. An atmosphere of peace prevailed over the obvious anxiety she had been feeling. They looked up at me like they would to an old friend bringing them a bouquet of hope. What do you say in a situation like this? We had prayed for God's miraculous intervention for her healing and now she was back with more tumors. After some catching up on what else was going on in their lives, I turned the conversation to spiritual things. Asking how their courage was and told them, “I have kept you both in my prayers and will continue.” I encouraged them that God is always good and, though we don't always understand His ways, we can trust Him. We prayed again asking God's will and intervention. Though it was awkward and comforting at the same time for both of us, I could tell that the reconnection with prayer and spiritual things was a positive experience for them. For this I humbly praise the Lord! I certainly am not a worthy or adequate vessel,

but I am so glad that the Lord had so graciously allowed me the privilege to be in that place and time for them.

A couple of months later, she woke up with what appeared to be a black eye. It's was one of her many tumors causing pressure and bleeding. We treated five tumors that day, retreating one of the three that we had previously treated. She asked for our "strong radiation today." You could see the pleading in her eyes for hope. I was humbled by their amazing cheerfulness and positive attitudes. I have never seen someone so thankful for every tiny thing we do, she is constantly thanking us. Despite the circumstances, they are both full of peace and are amazing people.

She described the new home they had just purchased and moved into--a dream fulfilled. Unless a miracle occurs, her time that remains is likely short. Her smile radiates with hope in a future with the Lord. On her second visit, in our discussion of spiritual things she had said that they were "church hopping." I extended an invitation to a new local congregation geared for young adults. On this third visit, they did not mention visiting the church so I didn't bring the subject up. Due to the busyness of having three patients, I could only visit for about two minutes before the neurosurgeon came in. I could only give a word of encouragement and tell them that I would continue to pray for them. My heart pleads for her miraculous healing. God has not seen that as His best plan yet, but where there is breath there is hope. And God is good all the time and will work out what is best for their eternal good.

The Blessing I Almost Missed

I had the opportunity of giving a tour to Jody and her daughter the day before her procedure. I received a call from the lobby receptionist that they had arrived. I went out to meet them and welcomed them into the department. She introduced her twenty-something daughter named Mary. Both were very friendly, and at the same time, very anxious about the matter at hand. I tried to give them some calming smiles and reassurance that, when doing the procedure, "The reality is usually not as bad as anticipated." I gave them a guided tour of the department explaining the basic process. I was blessed to be able to connect on a personal level with questions about family, occupations, and beliefs.

Our tour took us to the dosimetry room and we sat in front of the treatment planning computer. I showed them a generic MRI scan and the area we would treat on her. She suffers from a very painful nonmalignant disorder called Trigeminal Neuralgia—a stabbing pain across the face due to inflammation of the nerve that services this area. I explained that we have the best doctors and a highly trained staff, and that we have the most accurate piece of equipment in the world to perform this procedure with; but it is all worth nothing without the healing touch of the Great Physician. “Without Him there is no healing.” Then I said, “I don’t know if you are a believer or not but I am and I ...” Before I could finish my sentence they both gave a huge smile of relief. It appeared as if I just handed them a winning lottery ticket. I finished my sentence by saying that I had begun praying for her healing already; and, that every time I walk through the door I pray for our entire team, for God’s blessing, and for His healing touch to our humble human efforts.”

It is amazing that with a few words, and the power of the Holy Spirit, the entire atmosphere and connection with someone can change. What a blessing it was! I shared my testimony of God allowing me the privilege to, not only help with healing the body, but also the soul. I then asked if they would like to pray and they anxiously agreed. We gathered in a circle and had a special prayer for her healing.

She saw a Bible study guide that I had left by my computer and asked about it. I told her about our publishing ministry and gave her a copy for which she was very grateful. It was no coincidence that this morning as I walked through my office at home, the Lord had strongly impressed me to grab a handful. This was a new project just back from the printer called, “Indescribable Love Bible Study Guide.”

We finished the tour and they returned to their motel to await the treatment scheduled for the next morning. After ushering them out, I came back into the dosimetry room and dropped to my knees, with tears in my eyes thanking the Lord for the privilege He had just given me to minister to these sweet people. It is an amazing God-given opportunity to be able to connect with patients before their treatment. The Lord impressed me, “Merlin don’t you see the opportunity I am opening up for you with these office tasks? Now you can minister uninterrupted and connect and pray with these patients before the day

of treatment and comfort and relieve their anxieties ahead of time.”
God is good!

She was the One Who Blessed Me!

It was another gamma knife morning---up at 4 am, time with the Lord, and then off to the hospital. In my morning worship, I had lifted Doug and his wife Brenda up in prayer. This however, was not the first time. On April 20, three weeks before, Doug was treated for two “incidental find” tumors, the one we were going after originally had grown to where it was too large for us to treat and still avoid complications.

It had been a three-patient day, but despite that the Lord had opened the opportunity for me to visit briefly with them and help relieve some of their anxiety. We spent a few minutes catching up. Then I let them know that I had been and will continue to be praying for them. Brenda’s face had lit up and Doug had immediately reached for my hand as if to ask for prayer, and without me even asking. I prayed a prayer petitioning God to give them the strength they needed and for healing according to His will. Then I was off had to leave to perform my physics tasks in preparation of the treatment.

Now three weeks later, I had gotten up early, spent my time with the Lord, prayed for the gamma knife patients, and then I headed to work. As I drove, I prayed specifically for a window of time to be able to really minister today. God is amazing! He gave me an hour and a half to visit with them, which has never happened in my nine years of gamma knife experience. What I didn’t expect was that He would use them to minister to me as well.

Doug was back, the large tumor we were unable to treat three weeks before had been surgically removed and now our goal was to treat the tumor bed to prevent regrowth. I entered the room to see looks of severe anxiety on the faces of Doug and Brenda. Then, when they recognized me, it turned to a look of peace and relief. Before much was said Brenda thanked me profusely for having comforted and prayed with them on the previous visit. She said she shared the story of this blessing with her Bible study group and all were so appreciative because it was an answer to their prayer.

Due to the indecisiveness of the neurosurgeon on a medical issue with Doug's surgical site, I was able to visit with them at great length. You would think we were friends from many years before as Brenda filled me in on family and times past. They are the parents of three adult children. From Brenda's description they are a very close family. Doug was diagnosed with lung cancer that had already spread to the bone by the time of diagnosis. Though only given six months to live, they have lived life with some degree of normality for about two years. For this she was very grateful to God. Then came the diagnosis of brain metastasis.

We discussed many things including her belief system. Before marriage their roots were grounded deep in Catholicism. She came from a family of fourteen children. As a child, she said that she had yearned for a connection with God, but never really found it in the "rote" formalities of Catholicism. She eventually began to question the teachings of her church and she, and many of her siblings, converted to Protestantism.

Doug was soon drifting off due to the anti-anxiety medications given to him by the nurses. This opened a door for Brenda to share what was really the issue on her heart. She began to express her concern for Doug's spiritual state. Though his heart had softened some over the past two years and he now welcomed prayer, it had become obvious that he did not have peace from the Lord. I told her that my focus would now be to pray, with increased emphasis, for his spiritual healing and she was so very grateful!

She mentioned that she wants him so badly to come to the Lord and that she finds herself "lecturing" him on spiritual things, even though she realizes that this is not been, and will not be successful. I counseled her to turn from her spiritual lecturing to focusing on sharing with Doug about God's tremendous love for him.

At the first treatment, I had mentioned that one of my children was suffering from anxiety and depression. She brought this subject up asking how it was going. Then she told me the horrible experience of her son suffering from the same issues and how he devastated them by committing suicide. Though twelve years had passed tears began to flow as she gave the details.

After about a month of severe depression one morning they were in the living area of their home. She turned to see that he had left the room and the gun cabinet was open. She ran up the upstairs just as she heard the click of him cocking the gun and then he pulled the trigger. My heart broke with empathy for what she and her family had been through and we wept together. She regained her composure and said that her son had already died from the disease of depression before the trigger was pulled. With great conviction, she shared that God allowed this horrible trial for a purpose. He could use it to save her and several family members from their paths of destruction.

This prompted me to explain about the great controversy between good and evil that is raging on this earth in the minds of every member of humanity. And, though it deeply hurts the Lord, in His wisdom He must allow this to happen for a time so that the entire universe sees the results of sin and of the self-centered government of Satan.

I am sure she detected the burden on my heart for my own child. After having the privilege to minister to her and Doug, the tables turned, now she began to minister to me with words of advice and comfort. God's Word is true, in Isaiah 58 it describes that darkness is lifted and healing comes when we minister to others and we both experienced it that day.

Before we parted, I gave her a business card and told her about our website www.Bible-Lessons.org where she can download many other spiritual materials for free, that I believe would bring comfort and spiritual guidance, and she was very appreciative.

I told her about my wife's, music ministry and we would love to come to their church for a sacred concert. She seemed genuinely excited and said she would pursue it. I have continued to pray for Brenda and Doug and for the Lord to bring us together if it is according to His will. What a privilege it is to be used as a tool, in His hand, to bring hope and comfort to those who are in desperate times and, at the same time, be encouraged myself.

The World Champion

Mr. Cothran, the 81-year-old gentleman that I was about to meet, had a reputation that preceded him. While hurrying through my

quality assurance tasks on the treatment machine so that I could make it into the exam room and visit with him, one of the nurses walked by and said, "This guy is amazing!" He has been a track and field event world champion for 15 years in his division. He is also coaching a team to help others, and continuing to compete when not dealing with brain tumors." This raised my curiosity, so I did a quick Google search and sure enough the story was true, he was still world champion. What an inspiration!

As I entered the exam room and introduced myself, I felt an aura of peace and sensed he was a Christian. I had the privilege of meeting his best friend of many years--Bryson. We visited a while and I asked the customary questions about family, occupation, and where they were from. He was from a town about three hours away. He said he had a thirty-eight-year-old son in Texas and, unfortunately, doesn't see much of him. Thank God for this friend who has stuck closer than a brother.

I recognized the town he was from as a place we had visited numerous times sharing music. When I mentioned that we had traveled and shared "gospel music" there in the past he was quick to pick up on that. I sensed a feeling of connection and relief in his reaction. I asked if he was a believer and he said, "very much so!" I told him that it was my privilege to raise him up this morning in prayer and that I would continue to do so. He said that he had been praying also. Now with a new bond of common Christian brotherhood between us, our conversation shifted directly to spiritual things.

What an inspiration and blessing it was to meet this man. He shared how God had taken him around the world so that he could share the testimony of His goodness to him with others. As time ran out, I asked if I could pray with him and he readily accepted the offer. Since the nurse and his friend were in another conversation about five feet away I began to offer my prayer softly. They stopped their conversation and reverently listened until I finished. Looking up I saw a huge tear running down this 81-year-old man's face. I leaned down to give him a hug to comfort him, thinking these were tears of anxiety. He looked up and with enthusiasm said, "Thank you Doc, but these are tears of joy! God is good!"

I humbly thank the Lord that He, on one of the days of the deepest trials of my personal life, gave me joy and delivered me from the state of self-pity to be able to show compassion to a brother in need. As I contemplated that experience, I was impressed that God sends us, His children, not only to share hope with those who don't know Him, but just as importantly with those who do.

Unexpected Wisdom?

Yesterday as I was doing my chores in the dosimetry room, I heard the nurse interacting with Jessica, her husband, and their daughter. They were from a town a few hours away of 3,200 people. They are catholic and love and appreciate their church. A pretreatment MRI scan was done to determine if we would be able to treat today. With this type of treatment there is a size limitation and at the time of the last scan her lesion was boarder line. We never want to mount the head frame and then discover that we cannot follow through with the treatment. After the scan, I imported the images and did the measurements and preplanning. It looked huge to me, but the doctor who ultimately makes that call, had said to proceed.

I had the privilege of meeting them when we treated her a few months prior. At that first treatment, we had a nice visit and, when I mentioned that I started praying for them that morning and would continue, they were very appreciative. Before they left we had prayed together. Now Jessica was back for a retreatment to the same area. From the questions they were asking it was evident that they realized the outlook was bleak unless God interceded miraculously. The family was very positive. We had a nice visit about their church. I was able to share how intercessory prayer works.

God loves us to the extent that He gave His only Son for our redemption. The Bible says why would He not give us all things. Due to Adam and Eve's choice to sin they gave away the dominion that God had given them to the adversary, Christ won it back at the cross. Our prayers allow God to intervene and work through man the way He originally designed. I asked if they would like to pray and they readily accepted. We prayed for healing according to God's will and wisdom and claimed the promise of Psalm 29:11 that He would give them strength and peace.

Planning was rough, we had to import pre-plans and previous treatment plans. The volume of the four lesions was unfortunately huge. In two weeks three more lesions had popped up and the two we were originally going after had also grown. The neurosurgeon asked the husband and daughter to join us in the planning room, which had not happened in the nine years of my Gamma Knife experience. Because of the drugs, the patient was not in her right mind to be able to make decisions of this magnitude.

We explained to the family that there was much more tumor volume to treat than we had anticipated. If we treated that much volume of brain it would result in swelling, and potentially could increase her symptoms. At this point in the process, the goal is quality of life. We could treat the entire volume and probably extend life by weeks, but the family said her specific goal was not to “decline” in symptoms. I believe the Lord heard my prayer and wisdom was given to our team to treat the two primary lesions that were likely to cause the most issues from growth, due to their location. With the treatment, and by God’s grace, perhaps we have added a few months and increased quality of life. Without the treatment, it would likely have been only weeks, or less. God is good! He answered my prayer that I prayed early that morning for wisdom for every member of the team.

I entered the exam room following the completion of the treatment and removal of the head frame and caught her eating. I enjoyed a nice visit with the family. Though all present knew the inevitable outcome, a sense of peace prevailed. She requested for my continued prayers and I shared the promise of Psalm 29:11 that He gives his people strength and peace. I encouraged her that we have a better hope coming of an abundant life for eternity and she smiled broadly. Even as I was typing these words in my journal in the other room, I heard them profusely thanking everyone for what we had done. My heart aches for those who come through this department that don’t have the future, hope and peace that only God can give. I am thankful that Jessica did.

Confirmation that God had answered my prayers for our wisdom came when, after the patient had left, the radiation oncologist and I were discussing the details of the challenging day. With a look of wonderment, she made the comment, “Typically in this scenario we

would pull the head frame off and not treat if we couldn't treat the entire volume. I am glad that Dr. Anderson was impressed to do what we did. I believe we made the right judgement." I said, "I believe that God heard my prayer and gave you and Dr. Anderson wisdom in this matter. I never walk through these doors without praying for each member of our team to have wisdom and to do the best that can possibly be done for each patient."

I am prayerful that a seed of faith was planted in her heart! Maybe it was just my hope filled imagination, but I believe I saw a look in her eye confirming her realization that God had indeed answered my prayer. Another amazing day at the Gamma Knife department ended. I am thankful and in awe of the God-given privilege that I have to be a tool in His hand used to minister to the spiritual and physical needs of these patients.

God as Co-pilot on the Unforgettable Flight!

On this particular morning I had the privilege of meeting Jeff and Corina. Jeff looked fatigued from his life struggles; Corina was a very classy, sharply dressed lady. I sensed callousness toward the medical world because of all that they had been through, and who could blame them. Jeff had come in for treatment for meningioma. He had seven craniotomies as well as two stereotactic radiosurgeries at other centers. He had been dealing with these issues for fourteen years.

My interaction with Jeff, at first, was limited because of the nurse starting an IV and doing other preparations. I knew the neurosurgeon was coming early that morning made it a point to make it into the exam room to connect as much as possible before he arrived. Some questions about family, grandkids, and the city where they lived broke the ice. Corina began to warm up more and I was finally able to engage Jeff in the conversation.

Jeff was a retired airline pilot and, with my prompting, had some amazing stories to tell. Through elementary and high school my dream job had always been to become a pilot and, at one point in time, this almost became a reality. After completion of my undergraduate work, I was interviewed by a school of aeronautics and strongly considered changing the direction of my career. After much deliberation, I was impressed to stay the course I was on. Retrospectively, I now know God

was leading and I am so glad that I followed, though I know I would have also enjoyed that career path.

I asked Jeff to tell me one of his most challenging experiences. He told of a situation where the entire cockpit on the commercial passenger plane he was flying filled with smoke, due to an electrical short. He was flying over the wilderness of Alaska and the only place for an emergency landing was 1 ½ hours away. The smoke was so dense that you had to be inches from your instruments to see them. The mechanics had placed the wrong mask in his, the main pilots, reach. It did not have a microphone to be able to communicate with his crew or the towers. He was thankful that all worked out well and they landed safely with fire trucks waiting on the tarmac.

This focus on his passion greatly strengthened our connection. I mentioned I began praying that morning for our team and for him and he was very grateful. Then, unfortunately, the neurosurgeon came in and cut our time short. I was unable to offer to pray with them, but as I left he said, "Thanks Merlin, I really appreciated talking with you."

The planning went well and we treated four lesions. After the treatment, I visited another twenty minutes with them and our new friendship became stronger. A couple of times I brought spiritual matters into the conversation, but I sensed that this wasn't a priority in their lives. I sent several silent prayers up asking for the Lord to provide an opportunity to share Him with them.

Shortly before I had to leave, the conversation led to my part-time publishing passion. He lit up and said that years ago he had had a book published. I explained that my focus was on Bible study materials and a website that has had 13 million visitors in the past four years. This raised his interest and he asked for the website. I let them know I would continue to pray for his healing. They expressed how much they appreciated it. This was a time when I sensed that I would be crossing the line with prayer, so I didn't go there, but I do pray that God will impress them to read the study guide. It was another blessed day at the Gamma Knife Center.

The Universal Language of Caring

This treatment day I had the pleasure to meet the sweetest lady named Mary, a 42-year-old mother with breast metastasis to the brain. I entered the room to see this sweet Hispanic lady with a look of extreme distress on her face. This was understandable, it is not a pleasant thought knowing that you are about to have four screws fastened to your skull. To add to her dilemma, her English was very limited, so a medical interpreter had to be present. In the room was her brother from out of state. Her husband and child had stepped out for a few minutes.

I sensed, in this situation, a need for extra compassion in my countenance since our communication would be somewhat limited. I shot a prayer to my gracious heavenly Father and He is always good to answer. I smiled and touched her arm as I began some small talk through the interpreter. Her demeanor began to change as I visited with her and her brother. I told her how blessed she was to have the support of a wonderful family. I asked how long she had been dealing with this challenge in her life and she said that she had received her last chemo treatment the day her youngest daughter was born, which was about four years ago. She shared the sad details of how she was diagnosed with the breast cancer while pregnant with this late-in-life child. I was amazed to hear that they would do chemo during pregnancy. She was told that the child would be safe with the drug they gave her, and it appeared to be true. Next to her stood the cutest and most precious little girl you could ever meet. She also told me that she had two teenage children.

My heart began to weep for her and my prayers to ascend to the Father in her behalf. It must be one of the most distressing things on earth to know that you will, unless God miraculously intervenes, soon be parted from your precious children by death. We visited for about ten minutes about the usual topics of family, occupations, and interests. I asked where and how far away her home was. She told me the name and said it was about three hours away. I explained to her that my wife and I have a music ministry and that we have been to that place in the past. This struck a note of common bond between us.

I knew time was running out before the neurosurgeon would enter to put on the head frame and the window for me to minister to her would soon end. The temptation was, because of the nurse being present, an interpreter, and the language challenge, to bring our visit to a close. Despite this I felt a strong impression by the Holy Spirit to complete the mission—to bring hope and encouragement through caring and prayer. I touched her arm again and looked her in the eye and said, “Mary, I don’t know if you are a believer or not, but I am and I want you to know that I am praying for you. I began this morning and I will continue daily to lift you and your family up.” Evidently she understood at least some English. Her countenance made a 180-degree turn and her face lit up. In broken English she said, “Thank much!” Her brother’s look of distress changed to peace. The presence of the Holy Spirit was warmly felt. I said, “Mary, would it offend you if I were to pray for you right now?” Before the interpreter could finish, she held out her hand and her brother said “Yes!” and jumped to his feet. Confused for a second, I hesitated, and then grabbed their outstretched hands. We prayed for God’s peace to be with her and her family and for healing according to God’s will. Seconds after closing the prayer, the neurosurgeon entered to end our visit.

Everything went technically well. Unfortunately, a not so uncommon surprise awaited us as we began the planning process. We examined the MRI images to find more lesions. We were expecting only two lesions but found four. One of the known lesions had grown significantly in size. It is always heartbreaking when one of the physicians has to break this discouraging news to the family. This is another time when I am glad that that is not part of my role. My heart is always heavy in this situation and this day was no exception.

Mary was one of the most courteous and gracious people that I have ever met. It is ironic that they are often patients, or family of patients, in the gamma knife department and under these kinds of conditions. My observance is that the heart, exposed to the heat of affliction, will either be hardened like clay or will soften and melt like wax. It seems that many that are dealing with life-threatening and or terminal diseases polarize into one of two categories: one of anger and bitterness that causes them to lash out at others, or one of kindness, acceptance that causes them to be filled with peace.

Some are proclaimed Christians and know from where their peace comes. Others don't realize it, but God is holding their hand through the trials and giving them this gift. They often accept it and share it with others in their own way. Won't heaven be a wonderful surprise for these who, not even realizing it have followed the leading of the Holy Spirit to love others to God's divine plan.

It is such a privilege and blessing to have had these God-given opportunities to bring patients comfort in a very distressing time. Ultimately, we all are under the sentence of death and are terminal unless the Lord comes first. My prayer is, "Lord, please help me to be a channel of grace and hope that you can use. If one day I am confronted with a terminal illness, like Mary and many of the others that we treat, help me to be the inspiration to others as they have been to me. "

The Ultimate Formula – 18

My goal has been to uplift Christ and not glorify the devil. For this reason I have focused on the events that clearly revealed God's intervention and leading in our lives. I am not proud of the fact that I have experienced many temporary pleasures of the world; nor am I proud of the scars that have resulted. I can testify that these fleeting pleasures of sin do not compare to the peace and blessings of walking with the Lord. I am still learning how to do this day by day and, as I do, it keeps getting better!

It is important to realize that becoming a Christian does not exclude you from trials and tribulations, but you can receive the strength and peace to endure them (Psalm 29:11). He has promised never to leave or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5), though He gives us freedom of choice to walk away from Him. We are not promised "a bed of roses" here on this earth, but we can look forward to soon receiving the one that He is preparing for those who love Him and accept His offer (John 14:1-3). Like everyone else on earth, our family has experienced illnesses, accidents, deaths of loved ones, and many other trials. In these painful times, we have been learning valuable lessons of faith. How to trust and believe that the Lord has, and is, working all things for our good, though we don't always understand the process.

If you are already a Christian, my prayer is that you have been inspired to allow God to work in a greater way through you in the sphere of your influence. You can reach people for Him that no other person on earth can. You have a unique set of talents that no one else in this world has. He could send angels to do this honor but wants you to experience the happiness in life that it brings. Success is not measured by fame, fortune, or the letters behind your name. It is measured by the degree that you allow him to live within you and guide the path of your life. Real success is being in the center of God's will and service to others.

Whether we are aware of it or not, deep within our heart's we are all searching. Every physicist spends his or her career searching for the ultimate formula to explain the scientific secrets of the universe. Likewise, every person on planet earth is in search of the ultimate formula for happiness. Einstein, I am not, and I will likely never derive a formula that will astound the scientific world. But, by God's grace, I have discovered the formula for happiness. The equation and the factors that are involved have been around for centuries and published in the most credible scientific journal—the Bible and written by the most qualified and credible Author—Creator God. I want to encourage you to open its pages. The factors for happiness and a multitude of promises are there for you and you don't have to be a physicist to discover and experience them. I challenge you to begin your search today.

The Ultimate Formula

**HAPPINESS is to know the Lord = Prayer + Bible Study + Sharing
your faith + Serving others**

If you haven't accepted Christ and the gift of salvation, I earnestly encourage you to do so now. He has a greater plan for you than you could ever dream. There is no greater blessing than to allow Him to lead in your life. All it takes is a simple prayer. Won't you accept His invitation and give Him a chance?

"Come to me, all of you who are tired from carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke and put it on you, and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in spirit;

and you will find rest. For the yoke I will give you is easy, and the load I will put on you is light." Matthew 11:28-30

Notice He doesn't say, "Clean up your act first, then I will consider allowing you into my presence." Instead He says, "Come...learn from me...and you WILL find rest." He takes us just the way we are, but He doesn't leave us that way! He will bless our lives and open our eyes to the things that are destroying us. Then, by His power, He will give victory over them.

As I mentioned in the preface, due to page limitations, there are many important chapters of our lives that have not been included in this book—those highlighting many miraculous events in our music and publishing ministries. If what you have read here has brought you encouragement, you will find more of the story in the sequel, "The Voice of an Angel." Whether you are a Christian or have not yet made that decision, I want to encourage you to go to our website. There are many materials that will answer your questions and aid in your spiritual walk. There are two specific ones that I highly recommend that have changed my life: "The Indescribable Love Bible Study Guide" and "The Steps to Christ Bible Study Guide." Also look for "Radioactive," "The Voice of an Angel," and many study tools available for your free PDF download at www.Bible-Lessons.org. Some of the materials are available in book format at www.RevelationPublications.com. If you have been encouraged by this book, you can download and send a PDF or send a link to others. If you would like prayer or would like to share your comments, I would love to receive them at PublisherforGod@gmail.com.