

## Once again ... stepping out on faith.

On the morning of September 24, 2007 I had listened intently, and with great interest while lying on my sofa in a half-sleep stupor, when the TV preacher uttered the words, "You may think people are driving you into a corner, but they are really pushing you towards your blessing." Suddenly, I was totally awake and revisited my memory of what had been said. How interesting, I thought, pushing you towards your blessing! I sat up and started thinking about my predicament and what I was going to do about it. Anyway, I began to glaze over the flow of events that had brought me to this particular set of circumstances. After my release from the Gwinnett county jail, I had been introduced to a guy that needed someone to live in a house that he had recently purchased by a very close friend of mine. Apparently the guy's house was over in a drug infested area and the local crack addicts had broken into the unoccupied house and stolen practically everything of value in it, including the kitchen sink.

They also ripped out the copper plumbing that had been underneath the house, the outside air conditioner, the attic heating unit, hot water tank, and all the ceiling fans. The ceiling fans were ruthlessly pulled from there housing in the ceiling along with much of the ceiling plaster itself. When I went over to see the place with the owner, there was nothing in it that would qualify it as livable. I immediately noticed the rat droppings on the floor indicating the presence of rats but in spite of my phobia of rats I decided that I would move into the house. It didn't hurt that the owner had promised me 3 months free rent whether I was working or not. Actually, I could have stayed out in Decatur, Ga where I was living at the time but I was creating such a financial hardship on my land lord out there until it caused me to do the right thing by moving out before I tied him all up in the courts. I could have continued to live out in that air conditioned, internet access, and TV cable accessible house for at least another 2 months or longer but I had no way of paying the rent at all. I moved my stuff into the house on Lanier street within a week of meeting the owner, however, I floated back and forth between the two houses until the owner got the water and electricity turned back on. I had stayed in the Lanier house on night, all night, before any utilities were turned on. I went and bought some candles, and the owner brought me a battery powered portable TV set and also some fried chicken to help sustain me through the night. I thought he would actually see my desire to subject myself to this medieval arrangement as a gesture of my willingness to do my part. Before night fall, the batteries in the TV were dead so I only had the candles for light. Thank God I had bought the candles and had not relied on the TV as the sole light source! Since the kitchen sink had been yanked out by the crack addicts, there were huge gaping holes near the floor that connected the sink to the outside plumbing. It was these holes, and other holes throughout the house that served as access openings for the rats. Since I didn't have the proper tools to plug up the holes at the time, I decided to place the candles near the holes that were closer to the floor to discourage the rats from coming out of them or using them as an entrance. Then, I hoped for the best. About a week later I officially moved in.

After the contract had expired on what I had hoped would be my "dream job" at least that's what I told people, I knew that God was becoming very impatient with me. In a way I was relieved because what I had thought would be my golden opportunity for firmly establishing

myself as a LabVIEW user I was disappointed that my job responsibilities were, for the moment, reduced to very simplified systems testing that anybody could do with only a minimal amount of training. I had been all geared up for a challenging start but after almost 3 months it never materialized. On top of it, my manager had the idea that I would be, or should be, content with the menial tasks and focus more on the day to day operations of the electronics lab. Needless to say, there was no glory, or transferable skills, associated with doing that mindless work. It even placed me squarely in the gun-site of the two Black female assembly techs who both took issue with me coming in there and assuming the headship of running the lab without anybody telling them that I was in charge. Why this had not been done I will never know but it caused all kinds of resentment and animosity towards me because neither of them saw the running of the Lab as something that should be reserved for someone with my technical skills. My manager apparently left the task of usurping that authority solely on me, and everyday it was a battle trying to get their approval. It actually got so bad that one of the girls with the most seniority and who was actually a permanent employee started talking about what she was not going to do because she felt it more clearly defined that I was the one in charge of the lab. I could not believe that she would put her job on the line like that but there was some wicked spiritual battles going on up there if you ask me.

I mean, the tension was so thick in the lab at times that I at times I felt compelled not to say anything to the two of them except on a professional level. Sometimes I could look into their eyes and see the devil in them, and how mean-spirited and wickedly they were trying to make my stay there as unbearable as possible. I could see clearly what they were up to but trying to convince my manager, or anyone else for that matter, was another thing entirely. To give you an idea of just how irrational the situation really was, listen to this. I had found out that the girl who was an employee had actually applied for the position I had been given. I was told that the open position was for a Senior Electronics Engineering Technician but was referred to as a Lab Technician. This generic label confused everybody, I guess, and lead the assembly girl to think that she had the skills to apply. What she didn't realize was that in addition to the day to day lab operations, I was responsible for working alongside of the design engineers assisting them with testing and debugging the electronics they were working on. (However, during my short stay, I never got the change to do this.) She was operating from the assumption that if they would tell her specifically what to do, she could do it. To hell with the years of training one usually needs in order to acquire such a position. Her irrationality for applying for the position was the driving force behind the contempt she held for me. It was too crazy for me, and I begin to feel trapped. Privately, I wanted a way out because I didn't like working there. I didn't feel that I had a lot of time to waste doing something that would be absolutely worthless as far as my career was concerned. Soon, my dissatisfaction with the job made it easier for me to get caught up into other sinful practices. Looking back, dissatisfaction with my job has always been a gateway to living a more sinful life for me. It's as though I've always used this as an excuse for living outside the will of God.

However, God was not pleased with this line of reasoning and quickly relieved me of this contract-to-perm opportunity by terminating the contract. I never found out the real reason behind this termination from the company but I suspect that it had something to do with my relationship with the two assembly techs. It was quite obvious to others that there was tension between us, but what wasn't clear was why. Believer me, they didn't want to know.

After coming full-circle back to square and being unemployed, I knew it was time for me to make a drastic change in my life and the sooner the better. About a week after I had gotten the boot, the owner came by the Lanier house. Apparently, he had heard from our mutual friend that I had been working while living there. He was very adamant about his belief that I should be paying him rent in spite of the fact that our agreement had nothing to do with whether I was working or not. In effect, it held that I would be given 3 months free rent until he could get the house ready to put it on the market. He felt as though he alone had made, and was making, the only sacrifices involving our contract. This angered me to no end and I couldn't hold my peace. With righteous indignation, I coldly focused my eyes on the TV set as though I was watching a televised re-run of the horrid living conditions I had volunteered to subject myself to. I saw myself living like some kind of wild caged animal in this house in the grip of one of the hottest summers on record without proper ventilation or air conditioning, or refrigerator, or kitchen sink. I saw myself living in the house with the rates that scooted around outside and within the wooden infrastructure. I saw myself laying on the sofa, with nothing but short pants on and sweat beading up on my skin like rain water on a windshield, being too discomforted to move. I saw me existing, however briefly, in my own private hell without even an electric fan to offer me relief. After verbally describing the terrible ordeal I had endured, I turned my attention to the owner and looked at him intently and said, "Man, do what you want to do." I was done. I was through with his nonsense. Amazingly, he still didn't get it. He could only see his side of the argument. He told me that I had a certain amount of time to get out and then, as though to make a statement, pulled out what looked like a 9mm handgun and walked out the door with it to his car. To be quite honest about it, he could have just been doing it because he was leery about coming out of my house and going out into this drug-infested environment while he had a pocket full of cash. After all, due to the nature of his businesses, he oftentimes carried a considerable sum of money in his front pockets. However, I had initially thought that he was trying to send me a message just in case I wanted to challenge his resolve.

This could have indeed been the case too! The time he gave me was about 2 weeks short of the 3 month date. I had every intention of being out by that time but I couldn't manage it. The following day after the 3 month date I was still in the house, and not in defiance of our original agreement. I felt bad about that but had no place to go, and I was not going to put myself out into the streets. I was actually depending on the owner's generosity and sympathy. That was the day, the morning, I awoke to the stirring message of the TV minister, "You may think people are driving you into a corner, but they are actually pushing you towards your blessing." After viewing several other televangelist programs, I decided to prepare to go to the store to buy something to eat. Just as I finished washing up and shaving, an SUV pulled into the driveway. My heart sank. I'd never seen the owner driving that vehicle before but I just knew it was him because of the intentional way the driver continued to sit in the car, and the suspense was killing me. I felt the air being sucked out of the entire house as my breathing quickened and I began to sweat profusely, I decided to end the suspense so I called out the owner's name and he leaned over towards the passenger side of the vehicle and smiled at me briefly and told me he thought I had already moved out. I didn't argue the point but quickly stated that I was getting ready to leave at that moment. I'm sure this was news he wanted to hear. He then said that he would wait for me to leave. Since I hadn't been able to move my furniture out

I told him, in no particular terms, that I would have to leave the furniture behind until I could store it. He said that would be fine.

As I began to pack my stuff to leave, the TV preacher's message kept playing in my mind like a broken record. I knew that if the owner hadn't come by I would have continued to live there until he did come by, which could have been risky for me. I would not have left on my own accord, regardless of whether I paid him rent or not. I just hoped he wouldn't get violent or anything just in case I overstayed my welcome. Because of what I'd been through, I thought he owed me at least that much, even if he didn't see it that way. On the other hand, I knew that God had a purpose for my life and unless I got out of that environment I would not, and could not, fulfill it. I knew that whatever goodness or help I needed from God was tied up with me putting myself in a position to be delivered once and for all from drugs and alcohol abuse. Something or someone had to get me out of that house, and I knew it. A sense of relief and peace began to come over me as I began to put things in their proper perspective. I could now even appreciate the owner's arrival and should have actually thanked him for it because he was pushing me towards my blessing whether he knew it or not. Although I had known that my blessing was inextricably tied to my stepping out on faith into the world of homelessness, I lacked the courage to do it on my own. God knew I lacked the courage so he sent the owner over to provide me with the push I needed in spite of my prayers to God to keep the owner away. God's kingdom was much more important than my comfort, or fears. His purpose for my life was not going to take a back seat to my anxieties of the unknown, for we walk by faith and not by sight. Soon, I started to come to my senses and to take a particular delight in stepping out on faith. I got all packed up and bided the owner farewell, thanking him for the use of the property in the process, and this without a hint of sarcasm.

I joyfully walked to the bus stop and waited for the bus, not knowing where I was going but content that everything was going to be alright. The scriptures say that God will never leave us or forsake us so I knew I needed to be vigilant and look for a sign from God. Before the bus came I happened to see an old friend of mine walking towards his house after getting off work. He stopped to chat with me and told him what my situation was at the time. The interesting thing is that this guy was also house-sitting like I was while the owner fixed the place up. The house was about a stone's throw away from where I lived but he said his landlord had given him 6 months of free rent, even if he was working. We had both grown up in east Atlanta and knew a lot of the same people, people that had had a very close relationship with drugs, cocaine in particular. He had eventually gotten hooked on his own product but had gone through several recovery programs and now had some time clean and sober. When he suggested that I go down to one of the local shelters that was partially run by a mutual friend of ours I took this as being the sign from God I was looking for. He started telling me about the programs that were associated with the shelter, planting seeds that would grow in my heart and mind later.

For some reason the idea of entering a substance abuse recovery program appealed to me when earlier in my life I always thought my permanent deliverance from drugs and alcohol would come through the church or the Holy Spirit without any outside recovery program. I was delighted that it was a Christian program. I soon began to feel that this is what the Lord was calling me to do. God knows I had tried everything else to free me from my courtship with

drinking alcohol, even if I didn't think I was an alcoholic. And maybe this is where the Lord was leading me. After thinking about it, I decided to go to the library to do some basic research of the program before making a decision. I needed to know that it would be a Christian-based recovery program, and according to the literature on the website, it was. This was the confirmation I needed and it was then that I knew God had spoken to me and was bringing me within His will. I felt an excitement about it all and knew that I had to get into the program immediately or I would probably be in a shelter indefinitely. I did not have the luxury of being placed on a waiting list. However, the day was well spent and I would have to sleep at the airport terminal but I would get up and take care of the necessary business in order to get into the program. I decided that I would use the program to free me of the drinking that I was doing so, for old times sake, I got a final drink for the road and proceeded to the airport. The following morning, after making some preliminary phone calls, I went down to the shelter and inquired about the recovery program.

Halleluiah, I was admitted immediately! I felt a certain satisfaction knowing I was back in the will of God, and my countenance reflected it, my spirit reflected it, and my mind reflected it. I would not have to endure Atlanta's homeless shelters and I had finally made it to the sands of a peaceful shore after being tossed and turned in a sea of alcohol and lust. I was on my way to what God has purposed for my life and I was excited about it. I found out that the program was at least 6 months, with the first 6 to 8 weeks spent at the main facility and referred to as the PDP phase which stood for Pre-Drug Program. This was the phase of the program that would effectively serve as a filter for the elimination of those persons that were not serious about their recovery and would be too much of a distraction for the recovery of others. This is the phase of my recovery as I now pen this journal. At the present, I have been in the program for 4 days. Now that I'm all caught up with chronicling this journal, I will begin my weekly entries.

#### Week 1 (9-26 to 9-29)

The first day of my arrival was pretty uneventful and I participated in no program activities other than eating. Also, since I had not been officially admitted into the program but given a pending status, I was assigned a bunk in a dorm not associated with the program. I took the time to catch up on some much needed sleep. However, later that night when I awakened, I found it very disturbing that such filth and vulgar language was spoken out loud without fear of penalty, and that radios and battery operated TV sets would continue to break the silence of the dorm well into the night, beyond the curfew hour for 11 o'clock. I decided that I would have to just be patient and not let this interfere with my recovery. The next day I was officially enrolled into the program and reassigned a bunk

in one of the program dorms. My dorm would be the monitor's dorm which was responsible for providing the manpower that helped to steer and regulate the flow of client and visitor traffic that streamed throughout the facility daily. The dress code for these positions mandated that we wear neck ties and a shirt with a collar which were supplied by the clothing room. I must admit that I found my first night in this dorm most disturbing. After all, this was supposed to be a Christian-based recovery program and even had official rules against any profanity or vulgarity of any kind, which was officially documented in the application of enrollment. After

reading the listing of rules and regulations, I had felt reasonable certain that I had come to the right place. I felt I could relax and focus without the distraction of the ways of the world. I was wrong. I found the environment in my room just as profane and vulgar as the room I had slept in the night before. Actually, I found it to be worse, and began to contemplate doing something about it. I wanted to make a stand for Christ and remind everyone why we were here, and then I thought I would simply show my disgust with their behavior by packing up right in front of them and walking out the door, effectively throwing my hands up to my recovery. Then, I heard a still small voice somewhere in my mind telling me that patience is what was needed here. Not knee-jerk reactions. I decided I would be patient. Immediately, I was convicted in my spirit and remembered that patience was a fruit of the Spirit, and that it was now on God's agenda regarding my life. Through this revelation, I realized that my recovery would be based on my development of the fruit of patience. This has been a torn in my side for most of my life and has had a lot to do with my drug and alcohol abuse. I found myself praying to God for strength and guidance to do the right thing and to protect me from these spirits of vulgarity so they would not vex my spirit as they had done to Lot when he foolishly chose to dwell in the land of Sodom and Gomorra.

Lot had become such a drunkard, that through the consumption of a little wine he had been completely unable or unwilling to identify the two women he was having sex with in a cave who happened to be his daughters. The bible says that if we are not careful of the environment we subject ourselves to, and if we don't pray for God's protection in that environment, we allow others to speak that particular life into our lives and potentially disrupt it. That's what I think happened to me when I moved to Lanier Street in that house that was probable filled with the residue of the drug and alcohol spirits that had once resided there. Some may have still been there. Although I did walk throughout the house with a bible and pleading the blood of Jesus by touching the surface of certain parts of the house, I don't think I did enough to protect me. As Jesus commented to his disciples, some spirits can be gotten rid of only through prayer and fasting. I can hardly say that I did either. Now, here I was again a captive in an environment that I had to coexist in. I asked God what I should do and to give me an answer. I have a history of bullying people into doing things the way I think they should be doing in their spiritual lives so that I can find comfort. However, when you're the new kid on the block in an environment, that approach can have negative consequences. I waited for God's answer and found it coming from my own mouth one day while admonishing a fellow client for using profanity and vulgarity in the classroom which also doubles as our sanctuary. He had objections to what I was telling him so I ended the matter by telling him there was a time and place for everything. Immediately, I realized that what I had said was just as much for me as it was for him. That settled the matter of my dorm room, and now was not the time for bible-thumping. I would have to use prayer and fasting to protect me from these demonic spirits. If this place is truly supposed to be a blessing for me then I should expect to see signs of demonic activity throughout my stay here. I mean, I shouldn't expect Satan to simply allow me to walk through here unchallenged.

On the other hand, I shouldn't allow him to head-fake me into leaving because things aren't as I think they should be. They may never be. What's important is that I get what I came here for and not let anything or anybody stop me. Interesting enough, once I put that situation in the right perspective, it doesn't vex my spirit the way it had before. I don't think I've become

insensitive to profanity and vulgarity. I simply refuse to allow them to disrupt or distract me from what it is I must do here to achieve total and permanent recovery. I must keep my eyes and my mind stayed on Jesus, I am slowly becoming acclimated to the recovery program and to the vast variety of personalities here. I'm also beginning to sense that my presence here is no accident or coincident, and that it may even be necessary.

## Week 2 (9-30 to 10-6)

This started out beautifully. The weather was beautiful and my spirit soared. I felt that I was totally within the will of God. Later that evening most of the guys in the program went walking over to Centennial Park under the supervision of one of the program counselors. It actually turned out very well and no one misbehaved or got "lost". However, the time spent in my dorm during the curfew hour was very trying spiritually for me as the profanity and vulgarity seemed to soar to new heights. I was very grateful when, for once, the room went dead silent after the light went out. This was indeed a first. The sleep that I got that particular night was very frightful and lacking. I felt that Satan was again attacking me in my sleep by causing my heart to seem, at least to me, as if it was going to stop at any minute. The attack was relentless, and was the third time in 6 days that this had happened to me. Interestingly, this condition has continued in direct proportion to me trying to live a righteous and holy life, when I've stopped living a riotous life of sinning. When I am doing all that sinning it never happens. I have deduced that it is the result of evil spirits but I don't seem to ever be able to effectively eliminate them. I've tried taking authority over it through my relationship with God with prayer and fasting but it never stop for long. I don't think I really fear it as far as it taking my life because I know that God alone controls that but when I'm lying there half asleep and come under attack find it very distressful and scary. Most of the time I awake and then rebuke the spirit and it ceases but sometimes I rebuke it and it doesn't. This continues to puzzle me. When it first started happening to me back in 1992, after I started reading through the entire bible in one year, I was really terrified, but I continued reading it.

I had recently talked with this very Holy Ghost filled brother, at least I thought so, who told me that Satan was trying to kill him by giving him a heart attack. At the time I thought this was quite a stretch because although I was saved and been baptized, I was not born-again so I could not discern spiritual matters of this kind. I also wondered why this guy was telling me something as supernatural as this and thinking I would understand. I politely nodded my head wisely and gestured an understanding countenance regarding what he had reveal to me. Little did I know that I too would be under a similar attack, and it was because he did take me into his confidence with such a spiritual matter that I was able to put things into perspective when I came under such attacks. The thing that was different between our attacks was that he actually thought that he would die, and told me so. I never accepted that Satan could take my life without God approving it, and if He did, I didn't stand a chance anyway so I preferred to believe that I would live through them. I need to put this challenge at the very top of my list and rid myself of it once and for all. I am going to make it my business to do this while I'm here in this program. I have continued to be subject to these attacks on a yearly basis ever since I started to read through the entire bible on a yearly basis. I have read through the bible 11

times since I first started back in 1992. During that first year, it seemed something was trying to keep me, and even discouraging me, from reading through the bible ...period. That same spirit has still been trying in an even more escalated and urgent manner to stop reading the bible. The thought has even crossed my mind to stop reading it just so I could get a descent night's sleep without constantly waking up because of the attacks.

However, I refused to be intimidated because I intuitively knew it was the work of Satan and I was not going to be bullied by him, under any circumstances. Sometimes I even welcome the attacks and regard them as an indicator of how righteously I'm living my life since that's when I'm almost always attacked. I must admit that sometimes the attacks can be very overwhelming and alarming but I feel they're a very small price to pay for the opportunity to do God's work. I feel as though this spirit is trying to discourage me from doing something it finds very threatening to its existence or its kingdom, and if it does I have an obligation to continue doing what I'm doing not only to threaten it but to destroy it. For me to draw this kind of attention from Satan is confirmation to me that God has a purpose for my life and that I'm within that purpose, and within God's protection.

I have no reason to fear spirit's visits at night nor should I feel helpless to stop them. I simply need to do what James 4:7 says, "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you." It does not say he may or might flee from you, and so he must flee from you. This will be the weapon of warfare I will use in the future. I must make sure there is nothing in me that is not surrendered totally to God. Satan known who I am and what God's purpose for my life is and will never stop trying to disrupt my efforts to complete it but I know that through love and total surrender to God I put up my best defense and most effective offense in achieving the victory for the kingdom of God. This will be my strategy and plan of attack. Something interesting happened to me on Sunday while I was working as the monitor for the front desk. There was a lady that came to the door asking to see one of the counselors of the program. She never identified herself so I made no assumptions about her. I told her the person was not in his office at the moment but would be back shortly and that she could have a seat in the lobby until he came back. After about 10 minutes the lady got a call on her cell phone, apparently from the counselor, and told him she was waiting in the lobby for him. The counselor came upstairs and angrily glared at me, screaming at me and asking me why I had not called him to tell him that his wife wanted to see him. Unfretted, and with a humble spirit, I remarked that he was not in his office at the time. He then countered with why I didn't come find him. I humbly offered that I could not leave my post to do that. Lastly, he asked why I had not sent anyone to find him, and I again humbly said that someone had but apparently they did not find him. Knowing his anger had been defeated, he started to wind down his self-righteous tirade but attempting to maintain some sense of authority, though not necessarily rationale, by saying that it had not better happen again.

And just as quickly as it had happened, the storm had dissipated, and I was relieved. All of this happened because I didn't know who his wife was. How was I to know it was his wife anyway? And, how could he expect me to know? It would have never been a problem if she had identified herself as his wife, or if he had had the presence of mind to inform me that he was expecting his wife. It was as if his rationale was that I should pay for his short-comings or at least cover for him when he got a little sloppy when trying to mend his marital problems. I

immediately thought of the scripture that says, "A soft answer turneth away wrath ... (Prov 15:1)" and beamed with pride for instinctively reacting according to how God would want me. I guess I had personified what it means to have the word in you, and not to just know the word. Actually, I'm glad that it did happen this way because it severely tested my resolve to humble myself in the face of such negative aggression coming from one of the staff. Unfortunately, it is this kind of negative behavior from the staff that results in guys retaliating or leaving the program altogether. The storm blew by me so quickly that I hardly had enough time to acknowledge it. I truly felt victorious about the matter and held no ill-will towards the counselor because I never took it personal, and knew that regardless of the situation I was not responsible. God had allowed me to enter into his rest and I was thankful. Evidently, the counselor got some good news from his wife because later that evening he took most of the guys available walking over to Centennial Park. It would be an understatement to say that the counselor was happy because he had pep in his step and a glow on his face. He was really in high spirit. It was a good day. Monday and Tuesday was relatively pleasant without incident as I began to comfortably enter into God's rest. I sensed a joy come over me that seemed to somehow confirm my belief that I am once and for all drug and alcohol free.

I laughed and kidded around in a way that was reminiscent of my better days attending Mt. Zion Baptist church in Seattle, WA. On Wednesday I looked forward to an even more joyous day. In this program, the clients alternate between days spent in a pseudo-classroom for spiritual guidance, worshipping, studying, and group meetings. I like to think of the classroom as being our sanctuary because we consecrate it with our prayers and spirit of worship. We actually have ordained ministers come in and use it as a pulpit to preach the word of God. This particular morning the same counselor that had screamed at me on Sunday, as I mentioned earlier, came in to the classroom to do a self-development class. Although he's considered to be an accomplished motivational speaker who hits the lecture circuit from time to time, he is also a recovering addict. Part of his initial delivery has to do with working the crowd with seemingly harmless anecdote that are designed to give the an appreciation of his street-life past. This morning while he was giving his delivery he seemed to really digress to a state of mind that I thought was not only inappropriate for the setting but that was also detrimental to the recovery process and to one's spiritual development. The most important thing was that it was also against the rules of the program, rules that he specifically was supposed to be enforcing. He began using some of the most vile profanity and vulgarity to breath life into his anecdote, and he was taking such pleasure in presenting it that I found it very disturbing. It was if he was wallowing in it in an attempt to show us guys in the classroom that he could get really low down and dirty into just as well as anybody else. Something in me began to well up with such a distaste and repulsion for what I thought to be his deliberate attempt to smear the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to mock all the holiness that scripture calls us to adhere to.

He was in effect disrespecting the very rules that were design to develop morality based on sound fundamental biblical principles, like not using profanity and vulgarity, among others. Now this is the same man that champions and diligently enforces rules like being somewhere you're not supposed to be, or how well your bed is made. The hypocrisy was unmistakable. I didn't want to get into any trouble or disrupt the class but something in me was begging to speak out against his blatant and casual use of such foul and unholy language. I told him that personally I was deeply offended by his use of such language, and that it was all I had to say

about it. He immediately stopped in his tracks and shot a glance of indignation at me intended to intimidate me, and exhibit his authority. He then became very defensive, even to the extent that he was actually trying to justify his reason for using such language, and to showcase it as something that was necessary and appropriate for the message he was trying to send. He said that it was needed to reach certain people who were only susceptible to that kind of language. It was as if he was saying that vulgarity was not only a language but a culture, a subculture at that, and that the job of their program was to try to reach everybody right where they were. I gagged on the logic and rationale of his argument and was left breathless by the absurdity of it. I wondered how that could be so when they were the ones who deemed it necessary to forbid such behavior. I felt he was only fabricating this argument for the sake of avoiding his responsibility to confess that he was wrong by behaving that way in the first place. He asked me if I understood what he meant, and I quickly told him no, I didn't. After accusing me of having an ulterior motive of self-righteous grandstanding to disrupt the class and inflame the emotions of others, he continued to persist in trying to put a spin of dignity and professionalism on his diatribe aimed at taking the wind out of my sail of objection.

He began to take the position of the victim in being offended by such objections taken by me in public and felt that if I had a problem with what he said I should have brought it to his attention in private. He was reaching for straws, and over time he resorted to rants and ravings as a show of his authority and his right for what he had done. He then utilized his authority by forcing me to put away a copy of the rules and regulations I had been reading to present as evidence for why I was objecting to his behavior. I humbly complied and put the document away, completely submitting myself to his will. After failing to sufficiently convince me, and probably himself, that it was harder than he thought it would be to come up with a flawless excuse for behaving in that manner, he seemed to concede defeat and threw up his hands as he left out of the classroom, still searching his mind for the perfect argument. From time to time he would even pop back into the classroom like a salesman trying to overcome a perspective buyer's objections by presenting even more arguments that didn't hold water. I started to feel sorry for him and was hoping that he would just stop. The last thing I wanted to do was make an enemy out of him. However, I guess I gave him more credit than I should have because of his stature as a motivational speaker. I never realized how small his psychological stature was, and found myself resenting putting him on the spot like that. I didn't know he would have so much trouble with it. Most of the guys in the classroom gave their support to the counselor and even thought I should apologize to him for putting him on the spot in front of them, as if it were my intention. My intention was simply to get him to reframe from such behavior in accordance to the very rules he himself was obligated to enforce against us. Whatever his position, I thought the entire class had a right to know so that as many people as possible would be clear on their importance.

If they didn't mean anything, I wanted him to tell me that in front of everybody. I wasn't my fault that he tried to skirt around the issue. That was his misfortune. I was not responsible for that. I think the Lord wanted me to expose it right then and there so I stood by my actions. Guys started ganging around me, as if the counselor needed to be defended. They tried to get me to read certain scriptures they wanted to admit into evidence to shore up their defensive argument for the counselor but I avoided talking to them about it or reading the scriptures they were putting in my face. It was intuitively obvious to me that these guys had no idea of what

just took place. After all, the counselor was saying that vulgarity was allowed under certain circumstance, in blatant violation of their rules, and it was apparent to me that by their support of his position that they agreed with him. Now here they were trying to show me scriptures that would convince me how God himself was on their side. This was simply too much for me, and sent me seeking refuge within the classroom. After the dust had settled, I found a couple of guys that supported my point of view, with some convincing, and who made verbal commitments that they would like to get together with me for intercessory prayer and spiritual warfare in order to bring the spirits of vulgarity and profanity under authority by the power of the Holy Spirit. We would first seek out others and then touch and agree on the best plan of action. However, we would definitely act. I had expected to be harassed by the staff or called into the counselor's office for a severe tongue lashing or worst. His show of irrationality had me concerned and wondering how he would react to this situation as he continued to be gripped by it. Sometimes the power the staff enjoyed is sorely misused and inappropriately used to further their own agendas or cover for a particular short-coming. This practice blinds them to the real effects of their actions and contributes to the chaos and instability of the environment, and undermines the effectiveness of the recovery program itself. Their rationale becomes reduced to the bare and shameless bullying of "My way or the highway!"

He came back into the room one final time to exonerate himself by utilizing yet another angle of reasoning that promised to demonstrate his commitment to go all out to help people free themselves from the ravages of drugs and alcohol. Actually, I never challenged his commitment or his dedication to do his job, and thought that was wonderful at what he did. He publicly made the statement that he was going to give us an example of how he goes out of his way to help drug addicts. He informed us that yesterday a certain young white guy he was trying to help had been found hung by the neck at his father's house. He asked if anyone remembered seeing the young guy and gave a description of him. Some said they had, but it didn't ring a bell to me, and he continued talking about the events leading up to the guy's apparent suicide. He then said something that struck a cord of alarm in me and I listened intently. He went on to say that he had tried to get the guy into a detox program for heroine addicts because our program would not work for him with his withdrawals. That was supposed to be the plan so the counselor had it arranged. Then he said that yesterday the young guy had changed his mind about the detox program he had arranged, and that the guy had come down to the front office in this building and left a message showing his appreciation for everything and indicated that he had found another program, which the counselor mentioned, and that he felt would be better. After writing the message, the counselor said that the young man left without seeing him. I thought about what the counselor had said and my heart began to sink as my mind reeled back to the very moment I had encountered that young man. I myself had been the very one who had waited on the young man, and who suggested he leave a message for the counselor because the counselor wasn't in his office. He guy was very excited about getting the treatment and seemed genuinely sincere about his gratitude for what the counselor had done for him.

He also mentioned that the counselor had helped him to find a recover program in the past and credits it with saving his life. I told him that he should put all that in the message. I was happy for him. He had a glow on his face of certain victory over his disease and gleam in his eyes that I still remember but that gleam has been forever dulled by his desperate act. I was blown

away by how sudden life comes at each of us. This is a fate every addict risks and we all sat silently, internalizing this unfortunate situation. The counselor had made his point but I was hoping that he understood that I never said that he didn't care, or wasn't a big help to people seeking recovery. I think he has a gift for reaching certain hardcore addicts and helping them turn their lives around. The concern I had voiced in the classroom was meant to be specifically regarding his use of profanity and vulgarity in the classroom and whether it was condoned by the staff. If so, they should simply remove it from the list of rules and regulations. It was as simple as that. On Thursday night I got some news from one of the guys in the program that he was in trouble and that he may get put out of the program. Not knowing exactly what he was talking about, assumed that he was letting something or somebody get next to him was maybe making it hard for him to complete the program. Then he told me that he himself had actually slapped one of the clients because the guy got up in his face. I could not believe that his guy could become unglued like that. After all, this guy had previously been well church-ed, and at one point in his life had been his pastor's armor barer where he spent a great deal of time catering to his pastor's needs. I felt that he should have known better so I started admonishing him for his behavior. I then offered advice to him in how to deal with the situation that would maybe lessen his chances of getting put out of the program.

My advice required that he humble himself totally, accept all the blame, and not describe the circumstances that led up to the incident because that would be shifting the blame on the other guy for getting up in his face. All of that was irrelevant now and the only thing he could do was throw himself to the mercy of the director. He told me that he would do this as I was ending my shift at the front desk. That night it had been unusually noisy in my dorm because one of the young guys had brought his radio into the dorm and tuned it to a gansta rap station with the volume turned way up. I got undressed out of my work attire and into more casual wear and headed upstairs to the program director's office and waited there for him as I read my bible. The guy who had committed the offense was waiting for the director downstairs in the front office lobby, and the guy that was slapped was waiting out in the parking lot as if expecting the police to arrive, at least that's what I was told. The director came upstairs with the guy who had been slapped and went into his office. I couldn't help but overhear him telling the guy he was glad that he hadn't escalated the problem by retaliating, and said the he remembered the time when he would have handled matters much differently. At this, the guy beamed with pride and gently laughed. What I had heard earlier about the guy, who also happened to be a homosexual, was that he had come from New York and had served time in the Georgia state prison. It was said that he had quite a reputation for knocking guys out for messing with him. He was also a pretty big guy but was short in stature. He could have probably done a lot of harm to the much smaller man if he wanted to so it was really to his credit that he chose to walk away.

I continued sitting where I was reading my bible and awaited an opportunity to talk with the director about my situation. He gave me the opportunity and I told him about the disturbance with the radio in my dorm and who the offender was. He asked me if he was still there and I said yes, he was. He told me to wait right where I was and then immediately bolted down the steps to address the situation. Earlier he had had a problem with the young guy about playing the radio while on duty. He was not about to let the guy continue to be a nuisance in the dorm. While I still sitting there waiting for him to deal with the situation he soon appeared with radio in

hand and a big smile on his face saying he had taken care of the problem. It was now time for him to address the situation at hand concerning the slapping. I continued to wait where I was as the director went downstairs to bring the offender up to the upper floor. Soon, I heard the commotion downstairs moving upstairs in my direction and determined it was the director harshly admonishing the offender. The offender then got very belligerent and was stating that he was going to get that guy, that he would catch him a beat his but, although not quite in those terms. I couldn't understand why he held so much anger towards that guy because after all, he had slapped him, and had not been retaliated against. When he said that, I knew that he had never gave my advice any chance and was now driven totally by rage. I took this heated moment as my cue to leave so I went downstairs to my dorm to if I could read there without the distraction of the radio blasting, but first I would stop in the restroom to take a leak. As I emerged from the bathroom, I heard another commotion coming towards me. It was the offender being followed closely behind by the director and some of guy, apparently there to control the situation.

He and the director started to exchange words and the director started daring him to lay his hands on him. The guy turned as if to take the director up on it but was retrained by one of the guys accommodating the director. I was taking it all in when suddenly the offender broke free from the tight clutches of the guy holding him and leaped over the guy's shoulder and hit the director, who just happened to be within his reach, squarely in the face with a hard closed fist punch. The director's glasses rearranged themselves on the side of his head almost at a 45 degree angle across his ears. I watched in amazement as the director himself immediately leaped up over the same guy's shoulder and planted a fist up side the head of the offender. It was then that all the other guys who had been with the director joined in and restrained the guy further. Then they hauled the guy up to the upper floor, and I decided I had seen enough and went back to my dorm. I walked away shaking my head at the idea that the guy would actually hit the director. His fate was sealed after that but the guy was not through yet. As I was sitting on my bunk, one of the guys in the dorm came in and gave an update on the situation. He said that after they carried the guy up the stairs that he started saying that he was sorry about what he had done and wanted to apologize to the other guy. Apparently, he seemed very sincere about it and convinced them to release him. He then went into the director's office where the guy had been waiting. The guy who had been slapped got up and began to protect himself by staying out of reach of the guy.

They both went round and round the room as the offender pleaded with the guy to just let him apologize to him, that he was sorry for what he had done and didn't want to fight him. For some reason the guy who was slapped relaxed and allowed the offender to get within his range, apparently giving the guy an opportunity to apologize, and to allow himself to be the bigger man by accepting his apology. Then, out of the blue, the offender struck the guy with such fury in the mouth that it knocked his teeth lose and the guy fell back against the wall. The offender kept punching the guy relentlessly until the crowd of guys who had been retraining him arrived. This happened for maybe a couple of seconds because the crowd of guys was not far behind. As the crowd entered the room the homosexual guy had grabbed a baseball bat and was about to swing it at the offender but was restrained by the crowd, as was the offender. I listen with amazement as my dorm mate told this story and wondered if I had ever known the real personality of the offender at all are was I only seeing what I wanted to see – a fellow

brother in Christ. Was I so desperate to find others like me that I could not even see people for whom and what they were? I felt betrayed. I felt that he was only pretending to be something he really wasn't but maybe wanted to be. I mean, he participated in our spiritual classes on a regular basis and always had something to share. He always spoke of his backslidden ways and how he was trying to get his spirituality back to where it had been. But he also spoke about his temper, but coming from him it seemed quite harmless. This guy weighted probably 160 pounds and stood about 5 feet 9 with a very wiry frame. I found it hard to believe that this guy could be as physical with these other bigger men as he was.

I guess it's like the old expression goes, "It's not the size of the dog in the fight, but the size of the fight in the dog!" I would have to agree based on the damage this guy did. The offender was eventually carried off to jail in handcuffs and the offended was taken to the hospital for his mouth. It had been quite a day. The homosexual return back to the facility later that night and it was said that he had been seen that night standing outside crying. I wondered if he had been crying because he had foolishly let down his guard and was chastising himself because of it. Or, had he been crying because he had turned the other cheek as Jesus would have done but got a punch in the mouth for his trouble. I can see where this could be disappointing and disturbing but we have to remember that when Jesus turned the other cheek, he was crucified on a cross for his troubles. I guess we should expect mistreatment even when we do turn the other cheek. I pray that the homosexual comes to this realization and not let that incident stop him from turning the other cheek because it could get you put out of a place like this, where fighting is not tolerated at all. On Thursday night after my shift I returned to the dorm, changed clothes, and then went to look at TV. Since we were scheduled to get up at 5am the next morning to perform a chore that all the guys in the recovery program dreaded, I decided to turn in a little before the 11pm lights out curfew. The chore is making the beds for the shelter guests, and is on the top of everybody's list of dreaded chores. There are 6 separate dorms in the program spread out on 2 separate floors. Each floor performs the chore two days straight every third day, getting two days off before the next rotation. This may not sound like much but it can make the difference between getting a good night's sleep and not falling asleep in the classroom or risking the chance of falling asleep and having an incident report written up on your behalf.

The incident reports almost always mean spending the night downstairs on a thin mat with the shelter guests. The mat is commonly referred to as the Z mat. As I expected, the dorm was noisy so I waited until the lights were turned off, when the dorm is supposed to be quiet. However, in spite of us having to get up at 5am some of the continued talking so after finding it impossible to go to sleep, I hopped down off my top bunk and made a bee line straight to the front desk area and asked who was the staff on duty. The staff happened to be just arriving and I told him the problem and was told that he would be down in a moment and listen at the door to see if he could catch them making noise. I then went back to the dorm. The staff came into the dorm about a couple minutes later and told warned everyone that there would be consequences if the talking continued. That said, everybody went silent, and I drifted off to sleep. The next morning when we came back from eating breakfast, the guy from Chicago who uses all the filthy and vulgar language as if he knows no other way to communicate, spoke out loud that I could have at least said something to them first about the noise before going to the staff. I pondered his comment, deciding if I should even honor it with a response, and then

before I knew it had told him I was not going to waste my time talking to a bunch of little children because that's how they were acting. He then said that they were not children but men, and had a right to be treated like that. I told him that men had more consideration for others than that. He turned to another guy and started talking to him about the situation and how I had disrespected them all. At this remark I could not resist the urging of my tongue and blurted out that I was the one who deserved the respect because they showed me no consideration.

He then turned and glared at me in a very threatening manner and, with a look on his face intended to intimidate me, he said that he was not talking to me. Before I knew it, I told him that I was talking to him. At hearing this, he assumed an even more threatening tone of voice and his body language became threatening as well. He started telling me to stop talking to him because he might think that I want to do something to hurt him and he would have to handle the situation. I knew it was time for me to cut the conversation short so I told him not to say anything to me. We both stopped talking to one another and I let the matter fade away. I knew I had to stop talking because if that guy had done anything to hurt me only God knows what I would have done to him. I don't think I would have turned the other cheek but would have retaliated as violently as I could. God forgive me, but I don't think I have arrived to that spiritual level yet. Insults I can bare but somebody hurting me bad, I don't know how it would come out, and I pray to God that I never have to find out. For some reason I really feel that this guy is here to test me in some way. Considering how I dislike him, which is really unusual for me, I can just see God using me to bring him to Christ. I even try to avoid making eye contact with him because I don't like what I see. There is something very sinister about this guy in a way I don't feel comfortable being around. I get the impression that he is a vessel for Satan's will, whether willing or unwilling, and that he is helpless against being influenced by it. Throughout the bible God has frequently targeted people like this guy to come into the fold and do work for his kingdom. I often wonder if I am here to play a part in bringing this guy into the fold. Anyway, the guy claims to have grown up in Chicago, even though he was born in New Orleans, and that he was, or is, a member of the Vice Lords gang in Chicago.

He tends to use this background to instill fear and intimidation into the hearts and minds of the guys in the program. Apparently, the guy thinks that Chicago has some kind of monopoly on violence, and that life down here in the ATL is of no consequence. This is the logic or arrogance coming from a man that has yet to even experience the ATL other than living in a shelter here, and venturing out on a very limited basis. I think he found it rather insulting that I did not buy into the image of himself he was trying to portray as I spoke to him boldly, without feeling threatened by him at all but simply trying to keep matters from getting out of hand. Just because he was willing to risk being tossed out of the program didn't mean that I was willing to risk it. I simply made up my mind that I would have to avoid situations like that so I decided to risk leaving the facility and going downtown to the drug store to buy some ear plugs. I succeeded in doing this only by the grace of God because I was about a dollar short of having the necessary amount of money because I was also trying to purchase some small locks for my luggage to protect my laptop and I had to have them both. I couldn't settle for just one of the items. Seeing the desperation on my face or maybe even being led by God, the store clerk had mercy on me and told me to give her what money I had. I knew that she would have to replace the shortage with her own money but I know it helped me that she was a Christian, though she didn't have to tell me she was. The fruit she bore spoke loud and clear. That's how

I want to be, and how I try to be. This was indeed a blessing and I felt that God himself was making a way for me to stay out of trouble so I could complete the program. I thanked the clerk repeatedly and got back to the facility without any trouble. I truly felt victorious and my smile reflected it throughout the day. That night after I put the ear plugs in I slept better than I had since I'd been here. This was my way of removing my mountain and not giving place to the devil. Yes, this was indeed a great victory!

### Week 3 (10-7 to 10-13)

This week has started out better than any day I've had here. My spirit is soaring, as my mind is slowly but certainly being renewed and revitalized. I feel very physically energetic and mentally alert. Bringing out my laptop has been a great boost for my productivity and my sanity. Working on it helps me to keep things in perspective and also stands as a monument and memorial to the previous one I had but was unable to keep it from defaulting to ownership of the pawn shop. Although my current laptop lacked most of the software and other content of the previous one, it still symbolizes God's purpose for my life, which is intimately tied to my having a laptop. Having the laptop is also confirmation that it is indeed tied to God's purpose for my life because against all odds I still managed to hold on to both the laptop and my digital camera. Both of which I will need when I start the construction of my next website. God has been putting on my heart His desire for me to use all available resources to go international with my ministry. He has also put in my heart a yearning to preach the gospel through a video presentation on a regular basis to supplement my writings. I am so excited about doing this and am developing a passion to do it, something I have been praying to be blessed with for a long time. I do have one concern however, and that has to do with whether or not God wants me to continue with the program to the next phase. The next phase will take me to another location and from what I understand will not allow me to take my laptop or camera with me. Right now I feel an irrepressible desire and need to be about the Lord's business because I think that my sobriety is inextricably tied to my pursuit of God's purpose for my life and that only by fulfilling it will I ever truly be free of alcohol and drug abuse. I simply must turn my life over to God and start being about his business.

Unless I can get confirmation from staff that I can work on my computer and take my camera along, I will content myself with completing this phase only, which should be about 6 weeks. I will, in the mean time, continue to get as much therapy as I can, and to be as productive and active in both God's purpose for my life and the recovery program. After all, it's what you sow into obtaining sobriety that determines what you reap. If you don't sow anything in 6 months you're not going to reap anything so it's not really the length of time spent in any particular recovery program that determines the longevity of one's sobriety, but the amount of time that you sow into it. On Tuesday night during one of the spiritual services conducted by the clients ourselves I was hammered senseless by the disturbing testimony of one of the clients. Normally, such classes are led by outside clergy or authorized staff. The class was being led by one of the clients here that I met after I had taken a stand to object to the obscene language spoken by the counselor. He was a church member, as many of us are in this program, but for whatever reason was hesitant to challenge the counselor's use of such language in the very classroom where our most intimate relationship with God is maintained. Needless to say, the

counselors are not the only ones that desecrate the consecration of this room but they are the ones responsible for enforcing the very rules that their obscene language violates. On one occasion the program director's wife was leading one of the spiritual classes and as she was fielding responses to one of her questions, one of the clients used profanity. Immediately, she objected to his use of such language and firmly admonished him.

This guy was the same guy that I spoke of earlier as having the filthiest mouth of any of the clients in the program. I have since learned that the rules governing vulgar and profane language are subject to the particular sensibilities of the staff. Some of them object, and some of them don't. Anyway, on this night the guy that I'd met had found the strength and courage to take it upon himself to lead the class so I made it my business to make a visible show of support for him. Since I had been ministering to him I felt it only reasonable to show my support so I stopped typing my journal into my laptop and directed my attention towards his direction. I also stood and snapped a picture of him standing at the podium as a gesture of my support. He beamed proudly and boldly began to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. After his quite delightful preaching, he opened the floor up for questions, comments, and testimonies. It was then that this one guy, a young guy, stood up and blew everybody away with what he shared with us. Totally gripped with emotion, he started telling us that he had recently gone to court to follow up on the outcome of some charges he had pending for drug violations. He then stated that prior to being arrested for those charges he had killed two guys that day. He didn't go into detail about what happened but I suspected that it was all drug related. Maybe they were trying to rob him or set him up for robbery. I don't know why he did it, or felt he had to do it. He went on to say that he alone had been privy to these killings and had shared it only with God. He said when it came time for him to go to court he felt certain that he would be arrested and given a lengthy prison sentence for either the drug case or the murders, if they had found them out. With tears streaming down his face and his voice cracking with emotion, he said that in spite of being offered 15 years probation earlier for the drug case, the DA's office decided to not pursue the charges and released him. Nor did they connect him to the murders.

My mind reeled back through what he had said to see if I had maybe missed something. I looked around and saw many of the guys in the room crying outright or sniffing, and some of them had started walking over to him to comfort him with hugs and other gestures of support. I kept looking around the room to lock eyes with someone who was just as incredulous about what he had said, and what was taking place after he said it. I needed confirmation for my own sanity that what this guy had revealed to us was shocking and incriminating. I mean, legally he made all of us accessories to a crime after the fact, and that by law it was our civic duty to report it to the authorities or risk facing criminal charges. In effect, this guy was saying that in spite of him killing two human beings, two young Black human beings, that God saw fit to forgive him for them and that he had confirmed this measure of forgiveness by releasing him from any further charges. The logic and rationale behind this claim was at once disturbing and baffling, and challenged my entire concept of God's grace and mercy. There I was listening to the heart-felt confessions of a guy being convicted in the spirit for committing two murders, or at least two killings, and not feeling the least bit of social responsibility to turn himself in to the authorities. I mean, this is my understanding and expectation of the whole purpose for God convicting us in the spirit, especially for something as serious as this. I know that the bible speaks of our social responsibility as well as our responsibility to abide by his commandments,

and here I was struggling to find some scripturally-based rationale to justify and accept this guy's testimony as being worthy of my support. The idea that the lives of the two young Black men he had killed could be so trivialized and devalued was so offensive to me that I was tempted to leave the room altogether.

I started to try to understand what kind of environment could produce and perpetuate the idea that the senseless killing of a Black human being could be atoned for simply by asking God for forgiveness, showing remorse, and making a public confession. And, to further dehumanize his victims, he offered the scripture about the murder Moses committed as biblical evidence that God understands such situations and was more than willing to forgive Moses for what he had done and even used Moses to lead his people out of Egypt. And, since Moses had not shown any social responsibility, I guess he thought he didn't have to show any either. Yes, God did use Moses in this manner but I don't think that scripture gives us carte blanche to go about killing folks without involving the criminal justice system. From my perspective, it was intuitively obvious to me that this young fellow had absolutely no idea of right and wrong, yet he had attended, and participated in, many of the spiritual classes in which the distinction between right and wrong are the basic fundamental principles that form the foundation of everything taught in our classes. What was even more disturbing was the support and praise he received from most of the guys in the class as if what he had done was no big deal, and certainly no reason to be alarmed or shocked. I couldn't help but take notice of the guys that showed their support just so I could get a more accurate reading of their spiritual level. I just find it difficult to believe that a spiritually mature person could openly lend their support to someone making this kind of confession without any reservation. I don't mean to sound judgmental but I am really struggling with this one, and although I know it's not God's will for this situation to be handled like this, I often wonder if I'm behaving mercilessly. I've already decided not to contact the authorities but now I'm wrestling with the moral aspects of this tragic situation and trying hard not to become party to the condoning of this senseless act that took the lives of two fellow human beings. Unfortunately, by crawling into bed with this guy by neglecting my own social responsibility, I've become party to these killings as far as the law is concerned. As I continued to look around the room, I was rather disappointed, but not at all surprised, to see the guy, my friend, who led the class, showing his support and thanking God for such an outpouring of grace and mercy. It was as if he was saying that God has exonerated you and forgiven you for what you did so who are we to stand in judgment of you or remind you of your social responsibility, or that you probably broke the hearts of your victim's families and friends, or that by your refusal to turn yourself in you are placing an unnecessary burden on the already limited police resources in solving this crime.

I can't help but think about the ripple effect that likely took place as a result of this guy taking the lives of his victims, and how the lives of some would never be the same. I continue to marvel at the thought that people can be so churchy but not have any understanding about the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus was radical for social responsibility just as much as he was for the Kingdom of Heaven, which is why the Jews disowned him and wanted him dead. The Jews of Jesus' time were expecting a savior that would allow them to avenge the deaths of their friends and loved ones by the hands of the Roman Empire, and lead a revolution where anarchy and lawlessness would be the order of the day. To further underscore their position, they even went as far as asking for the release of a condemned and convicted

murderer so that he could help lead a revolt for them. Quite frankly, I had never been in a spiritual environment where the gospel was more twisted and taken out of context. Suddenly, the Lord gave me revelation that helped me to put things into their proper perspective. Everyone in the class was there because of either alcohol or crack cocaine addiction or abuse. Some were there for both. I then started to remember and imagine the kind of environments these guys had spent their time abusing drugs. In many of these drug-infested, dilapidated hell-holes gripped by the incessant embrace of drugs and alcohol, the value of Black life takes on a different meaning and in the process becomes less significant. For the drug dealers this equates to the amount of money that a person has available for the purchase of drugs, while the value placed on a human life by addicts is proportional to the amount of crack that a person is willing to share with them. If neither of these criteria is met regarding each group, a person's life is considered worthless, or otherwise insignificant.

Of course it's not as simple as this but suffice it to say that in the crack cocaine culture and alcohol culture the senseless taking of a human life tends to fall below the empathetic radar of addicts when the need arises for them to put themselves in the shoes of the victim. After all, the nature of the crack cocaine addict is to victimize others in order to support their habit or grave for the drug. Most times this is acted out in the form of more senseless crimes that continue to amaze and puzzle the victims but which make all the sense in the world to the addicts. I felt as though I had accidentally found myself in a private meeting where all the attendees were of one mind, and one perspective.

#### Week 4 (10-14 to 10-20)

I am beginning to come to my senses more and more and I think I have become acclimated to this environment. Most days go by without any real complications and I am still trying to get the most I can from each new day. I am constantly in fellowship with the Lord and use my days to get as close to God as I can. I try not to have any "dead" time where I'm just wasting time and not being productive in some way. By productive I am referring to either doing the things I need to be doing as far as participating in the program activities and preparing myself to fulfill God's purpose for my life. I am, in effect, trying to practice true contentment in the spirit of a quote that I discovered which says, "True contentment is a real, even an active virtue, not only affirmative, but creative. It is the power to get out of any situation all there is in it." I am trying to do just that. Each day I am constantly looking for new and creative ways of making the best use of my time here without wasting it. This isn't as simple as it may seem and requires constant vigilance and keen thinking. I admit that having my laptop sure makes it easier. On Monday, October 15, my world would change in ways I could hardly imagine. One of the counselors gave all the clients that worked as monitors, but were not on duty, the opportunity to go over to Centennial Park for a little relaxation. He also pointed to me and as the person who would be supervising the outing. Now you have to understand that this is the same counselor that I was bold enough to publicly take offense to his use of vulgarity. Although he was very indignant in the classroom about me making my comment so public, after that day he seemed to have a different appreciation for me. Maybe it was because I am one of the few guys here that don't mind writing up an incident report on someone who insists on behaving in a manner that either jeopardizes their recovery chances or threatens my own.

Either of which I have very little tolerance for. Provided my actions don't encourage any physical violence, I don't mind helping guys to adhere to the structure of this program because only by conforming to it will they be successful with the program here. If they want to blatantly live outside the rules they should just leave so that others can get on with working their programs. Most guys know that it's for their own good and don't make much fuss about being written up because they know that no one lied on them. I am all for structure at this place because I know that without it, there would be no point coming here. I think it is at this crossroad that the counselor and I meet and see eye to eye, and I think he recognizes me, and to an extent, respects me for being an ally because he is a real fanatic about structure. This was exactly why I challenged his behavior in the first place. I was totally disappointed that he would be so hypocritical about the very rules that he was always trying to enforce. I didn't appreciate his, "Do as I say do, and not as I do behavior." Why, because you are staff? To me that didn't make it right. Besides, he was doing it in a classroom where all of our spiritual nourishing took place, and I just couldn't hold it in. Anyway, here I was being placed in charge of our little exercise and relaxation outing. Since I happened to have my laptop with me at the time, I thought it would be a perfect time to see if there was free wireless internet in the park and I found out there was. I sat on a bench and accessed my account on MySpace.com to see if I had any messages. I had previously opened the account to post a webpage alerting whomever that I was looking for my son, Steffen. This particular night, I was moved to do a search for my son like I had done countless times before when I didn't have an account with MySpace.com.

The only difference this time was that I was executing the search within my website account which apparently is somewhat different for members. I entered several variations of his whole name as I had done the other times and then finally got around to entering the name "Steffen Watts." Two names were returned from the search and both members were 16 years of age but only one of them was accompanied by a photo. I investigated each one in the order they were returned and sent a brief message to the first member indicating my reason for contacting him through his email link. I then scrolled down to the next member and clicked on the photo to enlarge it. At my delightful amazement it was my son and I knew it at first glance even though he was wearing sun glasses. I was speechless and felt as though I was imagining it all. My heart began to race and my breathing deepened as I tried to take the moment all in. Here I was experiencing what I considered a miracle monumental proportion. I struggled to regain my senses and to continue do what I needed to do at that time. I wanted to cry aloud and just go tell everybody that would listen, and at the same time I wanted to enjoy the moment privately. I decided to do the latter. I remember sitting there thinking about how God had been merciful enough to pen this door for me in spite of myself. This was something God had been working behind the scene and waiting for me to come to my senses so that I could receive it. However, he was not going to bless me with it until I was ready to commit myself to doing his will. I want to think that God looked at my heart and knew that I was, and that I am, through with the destructive practice of alcohol and drug abuse. I really feel that I am free at last and I think this blessing is confirmation of it from God.

I was now in my little heaven as I clicked on Steffen's email link to get him my message as quickly as I could. I poured my heart out to him without overwhelming him with too much

content and sent the email. I then went to my MySpace.com page and uploaded more photos of me just in case the ones I had on the site weren't enough because I wanted to make an impression, or at least allow him to impress his friends by showing them what his dad did for a living. I was in a daze, and couldn't help but wonder why God was so good to me. I felt that God had made the internet possible just for me, just for this occasion, and that everything else associated with it was only incidental, like software, computers and networks. I am still trying to come to grips with what God has done for me and am still floating on a cloud. While taking a break from typing this entry, I was talking to one of the clients here that I have befriended and telling him that when I had gotten everything I needed to get from being in this place that I expected God to restore back to me all the things that Satan had taken from me as is alluded to by Joel 2:25, everything that is except returning my son back to me in a timely manner. I actually thought finding my son would come much later and only when I had completely demonstrated to God my resolve to turn from alcohol. It appears that God is quite satisfied that I will never drink or smoke crack ever again, and that's really how I feel about it. My joy and peace come from knowing that the nightmare is finally over. By the grace of God I have been set free forever. I have come to realize that I have gotten out of being in this program everything God wanted me to get. It really had to do with me clearing my head long enough for God to point me in the right direction, in his direction. I feel that understanding God's purpose for my life was really what I was here for, and used my time here to position myself for doing just that until it was time for me to go.

Now that my son is in the picture, I know this is confirmation from God that my time here is coming to an end. After all, how can I go to the next phase of this recovery program and subject my son to another period of being effectively out of his life when he is going to want to be able to have direct access to me whenever he wants. I need direct contact with him also and I feel that the period of quarantine that will be imposed by the next phase of the program would be a disservice to both him and me, and not conducive to me fulfilling God's purpose for my life. Now that I have my son back in my life it would be ludicrous for me to not take full advantage of it because I know that having him in my life is not only part of my life, he is my life. As of this journal entry my son hasn't gotten in touch with me but I am absolutely certain that he will. I have the patience to wait for him.

After we left the park we all came back to the facility and called it a day. Later that night, one of the guys in my dorm got into a heated argument with one of the other guys about something stupid. It involved the same guy that had started an argument with me, and wanted to take it to a more physical level. But by the grace of God was I able to hold my tongue. This time he was trying to intimidate one of the guys I had befriended and had exchanged testimonies with. They each had started out exchanging what would, under normal circumstance, be considered in our dorm as harmless banter meant to solicit laughter from the audience. The problem was that the guy my friend was joking with didn't have a sense of humor and really didn't understand the rules of such an exchange. All of a sudden the aggressive guy started trying to portray my friend in a negative and demeaning light but my friend rejected such an a portrayal and countered with a very firm and direct correction to the guy's accusations, however, he used profanity to get his point across. The use of his profanity, I think, gave the other guy an excuse to feel offended and disrespected in spite of the fact they both started out using profanity against each other. All of a sudden, the aggressive guy got dead serious and, in a

very threatening tone of voice, started raising his volume and getting visibly upset. He then started telling my friend that he'd better stop talking to him because of there would be consequences. My friend told shout back that he could talk if he wanted to, and the other guy countered that he'd better not say anything else to him. After that, the aggressive guy started snorting and then jumped off the bed and put his tennis on, signifying that he was ready to fight. He got back into bed and just lay there while my friend was talking to another guy about what was going on but was not directing the conversation at the aggressor.

Suddenly, as if he had been turning the events over in his head, he uttered an expletive and then jumped down off the bed and raced towards my friend's bunk. He was ready to fight and was taking an aggressive stance over my friend who was at this time lying down in his bunk. My friend started telling the guy he was not going to fight him about their misunderstanding, trying to salvage as much of his manhood as he could in the process without appearing to be scared. I mean, he did do the right thing because he was in a very vulnerable position with that guy standing right over him. I mean, what else could he say? The guy already had the drops on him. It wasn't a very popular retreat but it was the only action that was rational at the time. Then the aggressive guy did something that sent chills all through me at I watched in silence at what was unfolding. I started trying to get my friend to lower his voice so that they could fight in the dark without making a sound. My heart started pounding at the idea of this gruesome request and it all seemed to take on a surreal and demonic nature. I mean, this was twisted and disturbing at the same time. Here I was thinking for a split second that I was in some kind of hard-core state prison where violence was the order of the day, and of the night in some cases such as this one. The buildup or potential violence began to attract the attention of everyone in the dorm who was awake and heads immediately rose from their pillows, with elbows or hands punched down into the mattresses. Things were getting tense indeed and the silence was deafening but for the whisper coming from the aggressor who continued standing over my friend and shushing him to be quiet because, as he whispered resoundingly, "Bad boys don't make noise." My friend continued to send messages of retreat to him and the guy finally walked away with an air of victory boldly uttering an expletive declaring to the rest of us guys in the dorm that he was a real OG.

Afterwards, we all went to sleep but before I did, I could not help but notice that my heart was still pounding away. There was just something unnatural and sinister about what I had witnessed and I was still caught in the grips of it. I kind of felt sorry for that guy having lived a life of street gangs and prison. It was clearer to me than ever that this guy was one-dimensional and was only comfortable with that lifestyle, and if that lifestyle didn't exist, he would do what he could to create it. Either this guy was the real deal or he was, for whatever reason so fascinated and infatuated with the gang and prison culture to such an extent that he was willing to place himself in harm's way. Although he was a relatively tall guy, maybe 6'2" and about 200 pounds, he wasn't at all the body type for such bullying practices. For one thing, he didn't have any fighting scars in his face, no missing teeth, no knuckle cuts or anything. I happen to know that physical fighting leaves it's marks and if you have been in a real fight, and not just beat up on smaller, intimidated men, you are going to have them. As a matter of fact, if you have fought someone of your own stature who is just as ferocious as you are you are going to have them, and the very act of this kind of fighting will persuade you from senselessly engaging in it. I began to recall that this guy only got this aggressive with men much smaller

than he was. It was as if the bigger, more muscular guys were perfect, and never did anything to attract his wrath. Yeah, right! He simply never made a big deal about it. He was only a bully who had not gotten his ass kicked real proper like by a smaller man. He was not an OG if you ask me. I remember listening to him talking to one of the guys when I was first moved into the dorm and most of recollections were about when he was a teenager. He didn't talk about his time on the street after that. This makes me think that he never had one because he was in prison for all or most of that time. No doubt he saw horrible fights that took place in the dark between gang members or guys who had a beef against one another but I doubt if he actually participated in them mano-e-mano himself. I also noticed that he was not a social person outside the dorm and only seemed to socialize with the guys in the dorm, at least the ones who could tolerate his volatile behavior. It's becoming harder and harder for him to find anyone in here that will hold a conversation with him because of this. I try to stay away from him and spend as much time out of the dorm as I can so that I can avoid any nonsense from him. I don't trust myself around people like him so I give them a lot of space. Finally, I went to sleep.

Praise God! My son has contacted me at last! In spite of my having found my precious son Steffen, I was still not sure to what degree his mother had poisoned his mind towards me. I was wondering if maybe she had told him that it was me who had abandoned him, and not that she had chosen to take him out of my life without my knowing where she went with him. But God is good and has restored my relationship back again with my son. I was so thrilled that he was just as excited about me finding him as I was about finding him. That's my son! Now I know that my time here is about up because I have to communicate with my son on a regular basis and nothing must interfere with that. He sent me his home phone number and I promised him I would give him a call the next day. I did call the next day at the time I said I would but no one answered the phone. I then called several more times but still got no one on the phone. I started to think the worst; that his mother had tried to prevent me from talking to him. I imagined her taking him to play BINGO with her at the last minute, just so she would have a perfect excuse for not having the phone turned on when I called. My imagination was running wild and I was thinking all sorts of negative things regarding why no one was answering the phone. Did my son start having second thoughts about talking with me after being admonished by his mother? Was his mother going to forbid any contact with me because I had not paid child support lately? Was this ... was that? It was beginning to wear me out. I decided to stop calling, and to stop thinking about it.

I started calling him on Saturday afternoon, just to give him some time to get up and do the chores that I'm sure his mother had arranged for him to do. I didn't want to disrupt the normal flow of their home life. I knew that she would be resentful of that, and even feel threatened by it. I called later that evening but still got no answer on the phone so I left another message. I was starting to get pretty depressed. I was so close to hearing his voice, which made me wonder how he would sound as a sixteen year old. Would his voice be recognizable? Would it betray a secret about his sexuality? On his Myspace site, his profile indicated he was straight. Was he hiding behind the word itself because of what it would naturally persuade people to believe? But then, the photo of him on his web page, and the photo he took with his male friend boasted a definitive masculine character. Would his voice betray a psychological disorder? I think it ran in his mother's family. Her mother had psychological issues she had told me, and later I came to find out that she herself had them, and also suffered from bipolar disorder. It served me right

to be blind to her mental symptoms, because I was only concerned about my life and how I could get the most pleasure out of it. Her symptoms were all in my face but I didn't want to see them. I didn't want anything to rock my boat of self-gratification. Yes, I knew something was not quite right with her but then women, I thought, were mysteriously irrational creatures anyway, especially if they were in love. She would do and say a lot of things that prompted me to think she wasn't all there but I arrogantly thought it was because she was either in love with me or was sabotaging our relationship in order to prevent falling in love with me. At the time, this line of reasoning worked for me and gave me the motivation to continue our love-hate relationship.

Now here I was wondering who would be on the other end of the phone once I made contact with my son. Life comes at us fast, and kids grow up even faster. The changes a young kid my son's age goes through in three years can be astounding, not only physically but psychologically. Judging from his photo I don't think he has changed all that much physically but his psyche could have changed drastically. I remember when he was 13; we used to both have low opinions of hip hop music, especially gansta rap. My son was obsessed with the Temptations in general, and with David Ruffin in particular. This was an interest we could both share and we did quite regularly. Now I was wondering if he had grown out of his love for old school music since he no longer had me to share it with because his mother loved hip hop and really tried to get him to like it. I wondered how successful she had been and if he had simply given up and accepted hip hop on her terms, gansta rap and all. This made me wonder how he would answer the phone. Would he answer it saying, "What up dad?" Or would his voice embody the remnants of the little boy I last saw three years ago by saying, "Hi dad!"

#### Week 5 (10-21 to 10-27)

Sunday morning I was told by the guy who let me use his phone to make the calls that my son had left a message on his phone and that he would let me listen to it after breakfast. I anxiously waited that moment. When it came, I was so relieved to hear his voice, the unmistakable voice of my beloved son. It was a bit deeper and full bodied but it was the Steffen that I knew from three years ago. It was characterized by the same quietly reluctant, almost apologetic, humble demeanor that always captivated my heart. He was so much like I used to be before my family moved to Lightning, changing my behavior and character for the worse. With my son, it was evident that he had inherited my Y chromosome completely and could try to live a life that would enrich it, rather than subdue it like my life had tried to do with me, effectively making me a product of my environment. When we would have our intimate father-son talks, I could listen to him talk for hours. He would settle down, his face expressionless, solemn, and look me straight in the eyes and begin to allow what he wanted to say to flow out of him as though he had been specially picked to channel an ancient wisdom directly from the lips of God. I would marvel at his delivery, and even more at his seriousness. When he would talk like this I would remember seeing him for the very first time laying in his mother's arms right after his birth, and thinking how much he reminded me of my mother, and how she had way of looking at me that would make me feel naked before her. As though she could read my very thoughts, and knew exactly what I was up to. I remembered that eventful night as clear as a bell; me coming to the hospital to see him after I had spent quite some time

drinking down at a local tavern, and him looking at me with that familiar gaze that I was well acquainted with, as though to say, "Well, just look at you. You're drunk aren't you?" I was struck to the core and almost stopped dead in my tracks, sobering up in the process.

He couldn't have been more than a few hours old, yet he was just laying there as if he knew the very meaning of life itself, as if he was intimately acquainted with the ancient wisdom of man's combined existence on this earth. He projected a sense of power and contentment that should not have been coming from someone only several hundred seconds old. I felt as though he was the parent and I was the child. After hearing my son's voice on the phone I was as proud as a peacock. He sounded like he was all there, and as a man at that. How could I have been so concerned about something like that in the first place? Yeah, I could say that now, but I guess all parents these days have that same concern under the circumstances with so many young folks adopting alternative lifestyles like homosexuality. I mean, I would hope that I would still love my son regardless but to be honest, it's something I hope I never have to deal with. I tried calling him later on Sunday but the line was constantly busy. I later got permission to go to the park so I could get online. Steffen had sent me an email telling me why he had not been available to receive my phone calls. He said that because he had to work on Friday night and then walk back from work to his house, he was not there when I called. He then stated that he worked on Saturday and left home around 12 noon so he could be at work at 1pm. He did not return home until after 7pm that evening. This definitely explained his absence but did not explain why no one answered the phone at all. Since it's his mother's phone I suspect it was because she is not at all happy about me being back in our son's life. I pity her in this regard because it is God's will that I be in my son's life. It was nothing short of a miracle that I found him in the first place. And this is the second time that God has allowed me to find my son against all odds. This is flashes of lightning striking twice in the same place.

The first time I found him was back in December of 1997. I had been away from Seattle for about 2.5 years, and had decided to go back home because I really got homesick after being away for 6 years. The problem that I was having with my son's mother also exacerbated the situation. Back in 1993 I had been trying to get visitation rights to see my son on a regularly scheduled basis. I did all the legwork of putting together the proper legal documents to make this possible with the help of a support group that advocated for father's rights called D.A.D.S (Dads Against Discrimination Society). They basically were a resource organization that actually defended no one but showed us how to use the legal system to achieve our objective by helping us with useful information like how to file motions and petitions, and how to write child custody and visitation requests. I had poured out all my energy in doing this thinking that the courts would be impartial towards me even if I was representing myself pro se. I didn't have a lot of money, and even less faith, to give to lawyers so they could do the legwork for me. I did have time, and I naively thought that I was acting in my best interest.

On the day of the hearing for visitation rights the county prosecutor contested my request based on statements made by my son's mother. I asked the court if I could enter written statements for my reasons for asking for the petition for visitation and he allowed it. I also asked if I could read it aloud and that too was granted. After I got about one fourth into the document, the judge said that he had heard enough. His demeanor got very serious and grim. He then looked down at me with disdain and told me how dare I make those statements when I

had denied my child. I asked him how had I denied my child and he reminded me that I had requested a paternity test and said that I had wanted it because I didn't think the child was mine. I couldn't argue with that because actually that's the only way that you can request the test. You have to have some doubt that the child isn't yours, or if you do believe it is yours, it would help if you could establish this fact beyond a reasonable doubt so that if anything happened to the mother it would be easier for the DFACS people to give you custody. That's exactly what I was trying to do but the only options for making the request was indicating an unbelief that the child was not mine or some other reason that was just as condemning. There was no option available for why I really wanted the test performed. The judge dismissed my puny attempts to argue the point, and his mind was made up. He further accused me of using my intellect to manipulate the system, and manipulating my son's mother. I didn't stand a chance in this court. The judge silenced me and proceeded to listen to the prosecutor's argument for contesting my petition. The prosecutor opened with statements made by my son's mother. She had convinced the prosecutor that I had expressed a desire to take our son back home with me to Atlanta and keep him down there. I felt that this was ludicrous because it implied that I was willing to jeopardize my career as an engineer and run the risk of serving federal prison time for kidnapping.

This would have resulted in certain ruin for me, and the return of my son back to his mother thereby benefiting me absolutely nothing by taking these actions. However, the court took the matter under consideration and dismissed my petition for visitation pending a report by a liaison of the mother's choosing. I was infuriated by these arrangements and made my indignation known to the court. It was duly noted by the judge. He then said that I would be given 1 hour per week to see my son at his day care, and only with the liaison present. The liaison would submit a report to the court based on how well my son responded to me and how I responded to my son. After an undetermined period of time the judge would make a judgment as to whether I was "fit" enough to have limited custody of my son.

I resented this arrangement passionately. This arrangement would require me to take a whole day off work because I worked in Seattle and the day care was about 30 miles north and took me two different county buses to get there. I couldn't get a driver's license at the time because of the traffic fines I owed. I was damned if I did and damned if I didn't because I couldn't be missing one day every week until the judge made up his mind. And, on the other hand, if I didn't make my appointment every week the court would most probably view my absence as my unwillingness to abide by its recommendations. I felt this setup was a lose-lose proposition. The anger began to burn within me in the courtroom and I felt like I couldn't breathe. I had to get out of there or I was going to explode. Psychologically, I threw up my hands and decided that I would never suffer through that kind of humiliation again. I couldn't understand how I had allowed myself to be so naïve about walking into a courtroom and representing myself when the cards were so stacked against me. As a kid, I had foolishly represented myself in a courtroom regarding a criminal offense, and here I was some twenty years later doing the same thing, and getting the same results. I chastised myself harshly and washed my hands of the whole matter. I promised that I would simply give it all to God to work out because it was too big for me. I would leave the matter on the altar at the feet of Jesus and turn and walk away and not look back until he had fixed it. I had never been so decisive about anything before in my entire life. I felt a sense of relief knowing that I didn't have to deal with it and that

somebody infinitely more capable than I would. I didn't care what anybody said about the decision I had made, and I was ready to defend it vehemently. That was the last time I was ever in court concerning my son. I forfeited all legal rights to his mother and left it that way until up until this very day. I never challenged her absolute authority over his welfare or his upbringing. After that madness was over I hung around Seattle for another year but found it too difficult to maintain my wellbeing so far away from home. I soon decided to leave and go back home.

I felt the call from deep inside my spirit in November 1996 to come back to Seattle to see if I could maybe find my son regardless of the circumstances. I knew it was a long shot, if impossible, but I felt Seattle was my best bet. For all I knew she could have taken him to Coffeyville, Kansas where she is from. In true form, I left it all up to God and went about the business of getting my church and professional life in order. About one year later I was walking by a McDonald's at night when I glanced the profile of a Black lady sitting in a chair eating with a small child. I thought to myself that the profile looked familiar as though it was a girlfriend of mine I had been in love with back in Atlanta in the 1980s. I stopped in my tracks as my heart began to pound and started to walk backwards towards the lady setting with her child. I looked intently as the lady turned to face me and was in for the shock of my life. We both locked our eyes on each other as though searching for something to say but unable to break through the silence. My eyes grew even wider as we smiled at one another and her eyes led me to the child that was sitting quietly eating his meal. I looked with great delight as I became aware of the face of the child for the first time. It was my dear son Steffen all of 7 years old. I immediately ran into the McDonald's to greet my son. His mother asked him if he knew who I was, and my son, in his characteristically tender tone of voice inquisitively answered, "My dad?" A big grin flashed across my face and his mother beamed with the pride of a prize hen at a national egg laying contest. I couldn't help but give him a big hug and plant a kiss on his cheek, just like I used to do. I got their phone number and followed up on my promise to contact them. That chance meeting would open the door to me and my son's bonding and my son, in his characteristically tender tone of voice inquisitively answered, "My dad?" A big grin flashed across my face up to this day.

I shudder to think that if I had never seen my son again until now there would not be a loving bond between us. Of course I would love him no matter what but how would he feel about me? I don't want to even think about it. I am convinced that it is God's will that I play a part in my son's life. I don't know exactly what that part will be but I will be there when God reveals it to me. These chance meetings can only be summed up as flashes of lightning striking the same place twice, a miracle. Well, I have waited very patiently for my son to contact me through email but I haven't heard form him at all. I did, however, add me to his friends list so that I could view his profile. I was rather proud and delighted when I found out that what my son had written into the field that asked him who his heroes were he included his parents. Most kids don't consider there parents their heroes but would likely consider them the enemy. I was honored that he felt that way about his parents, and overjoyed to be one of them. I have to admit that the same old thoughts casting doubt on our relationship started to creep back into my mind. Why hadn't he contacted me? Was his mother influencing him? Was she forbidding him from contacting me? Why the doubts, in light of the miracle God had performed in bringing us together? Was this a test? Was this happening just to see how well I would handle things

not going exactly my way, which has usually been a trigger for my alcohol and drug abusing in the past. I realize that I must continue to rest in the Lord, and just believe, believe that all things work together for good for them that love the Lord and are called according to His good purpose. I don't think God would have done this wonderful work for me if he had not intended for me to be able to prosper spiritually and psychologically by it, or to be able to give of myself to it. If it's not going to serve a purpose for God's kingdom, why would He arrange it at this particular time? I have shared with several people that I thought that in light of God bringing my son back into my life, I am taking this as a sigh that God is ready for me to cut my stay here within the first phase of this recovery program, which is about 6 to 8 weeks.

The problem with going on to the other phases of the program is that my contact with my son would be severely limited or non-existent. I would have to probably have resort to writing him letters at best, and phoning him when ever possible, which I just don't think would be fair to him. I don't think his mother would approve of this kind of thing either. She would probably suggest I stay out of his life if I couldn't be a dependable part of it. He's my only son and I am getting another chance to be in his life. Why on earth would I believe that God would bring him back into my life just so I could further disappoint him by telling him that I'll see him in about 5 months, and then we can get acquainted with each other? That's nuts! God could just as well have sent him after I got out of the recovery program. This is my child and I'm not going to let others tell me or dictate to me how I should handle this situation. I have had others wanting to do that all of his life. I, and I alone, will bare the responsibility of risking the lost of his love were I not to act appropriately. All my son wants is his dad in his life now! He's not concerned about me satisfying the opinions of others regarding how they feel about me not completing the entire 6 months of the program. Plus, the program itself makes it that much easier for me to do by not living up to its declaration that this is a Christian-based recovery program. Since I've been here, most of the evidence supporting that claim is on paper only, not in practice. The only real evidence that backs their bogus claim up is the fact that they do have one single classroom where volunteer clergy come in to share the gospel of Jesus Christ as a way of freeing oneself from the bondage of substance abuse, in addition to other recovery based organization members that try to convince you on the 12 step program as a viable means of achieving sobriety.

The fact of the matter is that they both work for some people to some degree but they don't work for everybody because of one reason or another. I happen to know that Jesus can set everyone free of whatever has them in bondage if they only believe and are willing to surrender their lives to Christ. A lot of people want deliverance but aren't ready or willing to surrender their lives so the 12 step program becomes their way out of addiction provided they do the steps everyday. This is a very heavy yoke for most. But if we surrender our will to Christ and take his yoke we will find that his yoke is easy, and His burden is light. This works 100% for all those who are willing to meet Christ under His terms. I am willing to do just that. I have come to accept that my sobriety can only be achieved through totally surrendering myself to Christ and fulfilling God's purpose for my life. Nothing short of doing this is ever going to free me from myself, or from the things that have me in bondage. I know this to be true for a fact. No amount of 12 step programs, meetings, or counseling can save me from the fiery darts and the complete and total wrath of Satan. I am a marked man and I must realize that at all times. Others don't know that about so I can, and must expect them to say

things that only make sense to them. They know nothing about the spiritual warfare that I'm up against, and how I am to go about handling it. I must at all time remember that I am a soldier in the army of the Lord, and that I must expect to see the influences of Satan speaking from the mouths of others. Satan would do whatever he has to in order to get me distracted or sidetracked. One of the observations that I have made about people's reaction when I tell them I'm leaving the program has been very disturbing to me. They all tend to become upset and extremely adamant that I complete the program. I understand their concern but they don't know me, or where I've come from, or where I'm going. It would make sense to me too were it not for the fact that I'm a soldier and marked for life. I could never live my life as others would say that I could. I must at all times be aware of this most important reality.

If, by chance, I'm wrong about everything and I leave this program and go back out there and once again become entangled in the bondage of alcohol and drugs, and the affairs of this world, then it won't be because God wasn't able to save me from the ravages of substance abuse but because I decided I didn't want to be saved. That I had not killed my old nature but had even resurrected it back from the dead and had breathed new life into it. It would be absolute proof of my hatred towards my son, and my contempt for God, and for his son. It would once and for all reveal for everyone to see my secret pact with Satan and his kingdom. I know this is a bit over the top but to be tested in this way requires a lot of faith, understanding, and prayer to find out what exactly is God's good and perfect will for my life at this time. Everything spiritual about it points to me leaving the program at the end of this first phase but when I share these thoughts with others they invariably advise me to finish the program. Mind you that these folks know nothing about the spiritual warfare I'm fighting. The real problem I'm having with staying here is this place seems to be a magnet for homosexuals and other men with depraved minds. They have recently admitted a guy who considers himself to be a woman trapped inside a man's body, and is going to have surgery performed to correct the problem. He parades around with lady-like hair extensions, long fake eyelashes, makeup, and until recently wore women's clothes complete with thongs for all to see. He still continues to wear the extensions and makeup. And even puts on the false breasts, in blatant defiance of the staff, when he goes out of the building. He has also been admitted into the recovery program and if he so chooses will end up in the next phase of the program. There were two homosexuals in my dorm when I got here and they still participated in homosexual acts in here, as do the other 5 or 6 that are here.

Of course they participate in the gospel programs and even call on Jesus as their Lord and savior but they just don't feel they have to stop doing what they are doing and this program doesn't seem to feel there's anything wrong with what they are doing. It amazes me that these guys can participate in the spiritual classes as much as they do without showing any outward appearance of allowing the Holy Spirit to transform their minds in conformity with Christ. I sense a kind of dark and devilish mockery in how they worship the Lord, and offer him praise. I don't understand how they could be so impervious to the word of God or his spirit. But then, that characterizes a lot of these guys in here who simply have hardened their hearts to the gospel of Jesus Christ and in spite of knowing that Jesus would be preached they still resist and resent the preaching of him, vehemently at times. Sometimes volunteer clergy come in and unwittingly preach God's word regarding homosexuality not knowing they are in attendance. But the homosexuals don't seem to be offended by it. At least not publicly. Until

the guy pseudo- transsexual came here, the clergy had no idea who was homosexual unless the homosexual spoke in a sissy voice and demeanor, removing all doubt. Most of the time they remain quiet for fear of being identified as homosexual and risking the chance of being openly preached against.

It's not like these guys are inconspicuously gay, but rather more like they are flaming, in your face, bitchy, homosexuals that have no problem making their agendas crystal clear: completing the program and having as much sex as they can. I even suspect, in their depraved state of mind, that they are only here to be with the men, and not really because they want to achieve sobriety. However, I guess if they can hit two birds with one stone then why not. Another thing is that in spite of the regular feedings we get from the volunteer clergy, the natural environment is still vulgar and profane in a way that makes me think that Satan has a grip on this place that he does not want to let go of. The profanity and vulgarity make me very uncomfortable in here and seem to vex my spirit. I just can't help but be annoyed and irritated by its use. From what I've heard, the same thing goes on out at the other places in you go to the next phases. It appears as though the homosexuals have targeted this recovery program as a means of providing them with a steady source of clean, often vulnerable, sex addicted men. It's also ironic that sexual addiction is the one addiction not addressed but proves to be the single-most thing that drives the homosexual activity here. The thing that is so disturbing about all of this is how well it is wrapped up to appear "normal" by a lot of the guys and the staff here. The staff has to know what's going on here but they act like it's something that should be expected. I don't see why they don't just make the place a coed facility instead of allowing it to be a breeding ground for homosexuals. Personally, I would much rather be visually undressed by some sex starved female than some mixed up kid with an identity crisis, and made at the whole world because the world refuses to grant them female status.

This is a mental health issue, and should be grounds for rejection according to the initial screening process these folks use here. Now I think that the screening procedure they use has about as much bite as a toothless dog. When I used to work the front desk, I was under the impression that this program really tried to screen out guys with mental health issues because of concern for the clients on the program. I thought, at least they wanted to identify them so they could get them the help they needed in order to function in this kind of setting. It's stressful enough for sane people, but could prove to be overwhelming for guys with mental disorders. This informal screening made me feel safe, and reassured me that I didn't have to worry about someone going berserk. I have come to realize that the screening means absolutely nothing. I am seeing more and more guys here that have very disturbing mental health issues. Not to mention the pseudo transsexual with the extreme identity crisis. I would even dare to say that the man-looking homosexuals here that only act like women, and not dress like them, are themselves boarder-line schizophrenics and need to be in a mental health ward. They are in here proposing to men, claiming men as boyfriends, and getting into cat fights about men. If this nonsense doesn't qualify them for a bed at the funny farm I don't know what does. They even refer to each other as being girls.

I'm sure that the prayers of many saints have allowed this place to have the limited success it has had. Actually, I'm amazed at how few fights have occurred since I've been here, as though the prayers of the saints have been preventing these men from being totally influenced by the

demonic suggestions being solicited by Satan's minions. This is a victory in itself. I can appreciate this victory but I don't feel I should let it serve as my reason for staying here. After all, when Lot was in Sodom he was eventually sent for by God. I think him sending my son back into my life is his way of sending for me. I can't help but think about Sodom and Gomorrah and how the bible says that God delivered him from a place after originally giving him permission to enter. I point to the following scriptures as the basis for my decision to leave after the first phase of the program:

*6 And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly; 7 And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: 8 (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;) 9 The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished: 2 Peter 2:6-9 (KJV)*

*6 If he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; 7 and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men 8 (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)— 9 if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment. <sup>[a]</sup> 2 Peter 2:6-9 (NIV)*

Both the above scriptures contain references to the Lord delivering His children from certain unsavory environments. I am persuaded that God has used my son to deliver me from the environment I am presently living in. I don't think anything short of God bringing my son back into my life would have encouraged me to cut this recovery program short, certainly not a job, and most definitely not a woman. God knows how to deliver the godly out of spiritually unhealthy situations. Unfortunately this week ended without me making any contact with my son. Hopefully, next week will be better.

Week 6 (10-28 to 11-3)

I must say that this week started on a very positive note. The guy from Chicago, along with several other guys from my dorm, was transferred out to the other phase of the program at another facility. Included in this group was my friend who had had the run in with Chicago, the name he wanted to be called by. Before my friend left I don't think he had reconciled with Chicago, which kind of has me worried about him. I think Chicago is still holding what happened that night against him. Later that night, after we were allowed back into the dorm, there was a less tense atmosphere in the room. I sensed that all the guys felt a definite air of liberation in the dorm. Somehow the matter of their transfers came up and everyone quickly joined in on the conversation. I said in a very matter of fact voice that it was good riddance for some of them and immediately everyone knew who I was talking about and joined in a shared their views. I then asked everyone who they thought would be the first one to wash out and the response from everyone was a unanimous, "Chicago!" We all laughed at the thought that we

all felt the same way about him but never really shared it with anyone else, out of fear that it would get back to probably. The fear I'm talking about is most likely not the fear of Chicago as a man but the fear of having to deal with the foolishness that could result because of his hair-trigger temper. Here we were all trying to get recovery because of substances that were ruining our lives and had no interest in sabotaging the help we were receiving by having to deal with somebody like Chicago who was here for simply because he had no where else to go. It was clear to most of the guys that thought he had nothing to loose, and he carried himself like it. Here he was in a drug and alcohol recovery center thinking he was in a violent state prison.

His every demeanor reeked of his experiences from being institutionalized by various prisons. No doubt the dorm we slept was a trigger for this state of mind because I often wondered why he wasn't this paranoid and overbearing when he was in other parts of the facility. It was like, when he was in a closed in room where the environment was similar to a prison dorm he regressed to the old familiar prison atmosphere. It was truly a striking metamorphosis that would take place in his behavior. Regardless of his raging threats, I don't think it was because of them that most of us guys were afraid of him. It was more that we were afraid of letting him take us down with him. We were afraid of doing something to him and ourselves in the process that would jeopardize our recovery. At least that was my reason for feeling so tense and uncomfortable around him. I don't think I could guarantee myself, or anyone else for that matter, of handling every situation I found myself in with Chicago. Somebody like his is bound to punch just the right button to make you want to cast it all to the wind. For me, he was simply too much of a willing vessel to be used by Satan. Satan could get him to very easily provoke me in ways that would be difficult for me to handle properly if I was caught off guard. I saw his presence in the room as a test of my humility, in addition to me being there for his benefit.

It's very stressful keeping ones guard up on a consistent basis. We wanted time to relax and get comfortable in our skin without having to worry about this dude getting upset about something you may have said to him. Very likely, it would not be meant to offend him but would be perceived by his warped mind as being offensive anyway. No doubt he would want to get violent if you succeeded in auguring the reasoning behind and leaving him feeling foolish. His ego was so vulnerable, mostly due to his limited social skills. He simply had to win every argument as though his manhood depended on it. Now he was gone at last! We all let our hair down that night and laughed and carried on like we had been held hostage by a terrorist and had been set free at last. In fact, we celebrated although no one really called it that but we all breathed a sigh of relief. I even began singing the popular Wizard of Oz tune, "The wicked witch is dead!" We burst out laughing and began dancing in the floor. It was such a relief to everyone that they could now once again freely operate within their sanity. The black cloud of anxiety that had been looming over the tops of the bunks in our dorm had finally been replaced with the sunshine of optimism. Yes, the wicked witch was dead and the whole town rejoiced!

Thursday morning started out with quite an interesting set of circumstances. I went into the classroom for the 8am morning devotional. Normally, we would listen to gospel music, courtesy of one of the program clients who has since been transferred to the next phase of the program, before getting into the devotional. Because there was no music being played for us on the CD player, I volunteered to play some gospel music from my laptop since I had it open

and was doing some bible studying with the aid of some software I had downloaded for free. I was all into the music, as were most of the guys in the classroom, when one of the staff members tells me to turn off the music. It was one of the big wheels who happened to be second in ranking next to the head-honcho of the recovery program. He would come over from time to time and lead the group meeting. He was also an ex-drug addict, and boasts of being one of the worst. Like most of the staff that works here, he was also a client in the recovery program and came up through the ranks of this organization to become one of its staff leaders. I knew that much about him, but I didn't know how temperamental he was. What I did know about him was that he had put more confidence in working the 12 steps than he put into the faith that God could deliver him without him having to work the steps. All he had to do was surrender to Christ, and turn from his wicked ways. With the exception of the program director here who found deliverance through Jesus Christ, all the rest of the staff found sobriety through working the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. These other guys all profess to believe in God, but whether they truly believe in Jesus as Lord and being capable of delivering them from the bondage of drugs and alcohol is another matter. This situation creates the foundation of the two schools of thought here in the program regarding recovery: Those that subscribe to deliverance through Christ, and those that subscribe to sobriety through working the 12 steps.

Although both are quite capable of helping a person to achieve sobriety, only one of them can truly set a person free, and save his soul. The staff member who was standing before me was a product of the 12 steps. He then took a more authoritative position and told me to put the laptop up. I then tried to bring to his attention the fact that I was actually doing my bible studying with it, and turned the display screen towards him so he could verify my claim. He told me he still wanted me to put it away and suggested that I use one of the hardback bibles that were in the class. I humbly obeyed by putting it away in my book bag. He continued to stand in front of the classroom giving reasons for his belief that a laptop did not belong in this program. He was really fabricating a lie to support his actions towards me, and I knew it, but I didn't want to add fuel to his fire. He continued by saying that laptops were included along with anything else that had the monetary value to tempt the program clients into doing something that they would not ordinarily do under normal circumstances. He was saying that my laptop unfairly targeted the weak into trying to steal it and was a source of undo emotional stress and distraction. I admit that this could be a valid argument provided that other extreme security measures were being enforced, like making sure all office doors are locked when no staff is in them. And what about the cell phones, cash, and jewelry that would certainly be a lot more desirable to folks than a laptop that more than likely would have password protection – not an easy sell to anybody these days thanks to Vista. To me, and to a lot of others in the classroom, his argument didn't hold water. He then mentioned that the way the program dealt with items like that was to confiscate them for our safekeeping. I told him that I didn't want to discuss the matter in front of the class but I would like to talk to him privately about it. He said that the conversation was not open to discussion.

I told him that my laptop was apart of my recovery, and that I thought that was what this program was all about. He said that it was but his decision was not open to discussion. I then told him that his position was not acceptable to me, that I was not giving anyone my laptop. He told me that I would have to leave the program so I got up out of my seat and headed for the classroom door. As I was leaving the classroom, the counselor that I had had the first

confrontation with waved me down and told me to wait for him downstairs. I waited for him and when he came down to talk to me he tried to put me at ease by telling me that the guy was in a bad mood and that if he took my laptop he would get it back for me. I was delighted that he was on my side, and really felt I had an ally in him. Considering how we had our differences, I would have never thought he would have gone out on a limb for me. He told me to go somewhere so I could let that guy cool down and forget about me for awhile. I agreed.

However, I couldn't help but think that I had come to a crossroad in my life and had to make a decision concerning how I would handle my recovery. Would I rely on the possibilities of the 12 step program, or would I pursue the spiritually loftier goal of trying to fulfill God's purpose for my life. The latter would, if I totally surrendered to Christ, also deliver me and free me from drugs and alcohol for the rest of my life, while at the same time bringing glory to God. The former, for me, was totally incapable of freeing me from myself, Satan, or anything else. I had already resigned myself to this fact long before I came here and now it was time for me to step out on faith, once again. This program was beginning to continue the process of pushing me towards my blessing! I would now have to talk to either the program director or my counselor about getting into the work program so that I could have free access to my laptop, and satisfy the demands being made on me by my son and his mother. I'm sure that the main reason my son has not been communicating with me is somehow tied in with me not being in a position to pay child support. It would appear that his mother is poisoning his mind against me and forbidding him to contact me. I know her so well. He would not act this way towards me for no other reason. This is also another viable reason for me to leave the recovery program at this time. Chances like this only come around once in a lifetime. If I didn't act on it in the appropriate way by trusting the Lord for my deliverance and taking full advantage of the blessing He has bestowed on me.

There were also some other interesting things that came out of the classroom after I departed from it. From what I hear, the staff guy used the whole period as a forum to continue peddling his reasons for the action he had taken. He even opened the floor to the opinions of the clients just to see if he had any support. There were a few that support me, but there were many who supported him. One of the ones that supported him was a guy from my dorm. From what I understand, the guy in my dorm and the staff guy had been drug buddies before the staff member got his life together. I guess he was kissing up to him but still I think he betrayed our friendship, if you can call it that. I could sense that the guy was trying to get to know me so I took an opportunity to rap with him in the bathroom one day. He had told me that he didn't think that the spirituality aspect of the program was doing anything for him. He said that he had once been very active inside the church and could remember how he had felt at the time but was concerned that he didn't feel that way now and didn't think he needed to feel that way in order to achieve recovery. I didn't agree with him and told him so. I also reminded him that since he had at one time in his life walked with the Lord, he has made himself a target of Satan's kingdom for destruction and it didn't matter if he was aware of it or not. I tried my best to get him to see that only complete and total surrender to Christ was going to work for him now and that no amount of 12 step programs were going to save him from the wrath of Satan. In silence he agreed with a nod, and with a look of preoccupation, he slowly walked away as if looking for something he had dropped on the ground. I walked back to the dorm with a sense of gloom, not really satisfied with myself that I had truly reached that guy. After that encounter,

several days later he approached me and asked me if I had any AA batteries I could let him have so he could listen to a CD player somebody had given him.

I offered him an extra battery I happened to have. I had more than the one battery to spare but I didn't know him that well and decided I would keep what I had left for myself. I'm so glad I did because from what I was told, he had agreed with his old drug buddy and had even volunteered more information that was potentially damaging to me, and my position. He told everyone that he noticed that I carried my laptop with me everywhere except to the showers, and there I was vulnerable. He even said it as if to be inviting the rest of the guys to take advantage of my so-called vulnerability. What a Judas goat, I thought. I could just imagine him and his drug buddy slapping one another on the back, mouths wide open, laughing their hearts out, and holding their sides as they struggled to keep from laughing themselves to death. I simply could not believe that guy could be so duplicitous to me after what I had shared with him. It's not every day that you can get people to be real with you, and share their stuff with you without knowing you. Maybe that's part of the challenge here for me. I still tend to give these guys the benefit of thinking rationally in spite of the trauma inflicted on their brains by all the drinking and drugging. I seem to be the only guy in the program here that has had God's protection against the destructive power of alcohol and crack. God's word says that those that belong to him will not be afflicted by the ravages of many perils. (Isaiah 43:1,2) I have often come to the realization that my mental aptitude and psychological well-being has only been preserved but by the grace of God. It amazes me that my state of mind is as well kept as it is, and not suffering from the destructive effects of substance abuse that has claimed the minds of many addicts. God is truly awesome! I was disappointed by the guy's deliberate attempt to disassociate himself with me because of what was taking place but then how can I hold it against him in the state of mind he's in. I have to acknowledge that he's not 100% himself, and may not be anywhere close to it.

This is typical of most of the guys here and places the demand on me to be more patience, tolerant, and forgiving of them, which is the real reason why I'm here. God is using this period in my life to bring me close to the character of Christ by helping me to develop more of the Fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22), like long-suffering and temperance. I have also had to call on some of the more established fruit the Lord has developed in me like love, peace, gentleness, and goodness to help me through some of the more trying circumstances of this phase of my recovery. I am convinced that every aspect of my life somehow has to do with the development of these fruit in me, and that if I heed this call, nothing in my life should be insurmountable. Another interesting, although unfortunate, development has taken place. The very same guy who had spoken out against me has left the program. I recall that the next morning after the incident with the laptop we had to make the beds for the shelter guests. Normally we would partner up with one another and make them that way. This morning I took notice of him trying to partner up with me like we had done before but when I saw him coming over to a bed I was in the process of making, I would quickly find a reason for leaving to go to another room. I noticed that he would follow me, but I didn't know if he was aware that I was intentionally avoiding him. He followed me to another bed, but I did that same thing to avoid partnering up with him. Finally, I went to another bed and he was more aggressively trying to partner up with me but then I felt that I must address the situation. I stopped making the bed, looked him straight in the eyes, and quietly asked him why he had made a public statement in the class

that he would steal my laptop if he ever got the chance. He stalled with his answer, started using profanity to emphasize his position, and adamantly declared that he had not made that statement; that it had been taken out of context. I knew he was lying, and I think he knew I knew he was lying. I looked at him and gave him a smirk to show my disbelief in what he had told me. He then asked me if that was the reason I had been avoiding his partnership making the beds. I looked at him and told him yes; surprised that he had been so perceptive.

He had caught me off guard. He then walked away, mumbling something under his voice. The next day I heard that he had not come back to the facility from a pass he had gotten the day before. Immediately, the thought of our conversation came back to me. I was kind of disturbed that he had taken such extreme measures in responding to this situation. I wondered if when he made the initial comments he thought that no one would report it back to me. I wondered if he had maybe experienced a measure of his betrayal from some of the other guys and didn't feel comfortable coming back to the program. I remembered telling him that until he totally surrendered to God, and not depended on the twelve steps to save him from his addiction, he would never be free. I don't know if it was due to his being tempted with drugs or alcohol while he was on his pass or if he had already decided he would be leaving the program and used his pass an opportunity to get away. Secretly, I wondered if it was God retaliating against him for making the comments he did in the classroom, encouraging others to steal my laptop if they could, not knowing that the laptop was also an instrument of God's work. Whatever the case, I felt bad for him. No one deserves to be held in bondage to drugs and alcohol, not even my worst enemy.

My son has not contacted me this week, and it is causing me great concern. I contacted him earlier this week to see if he could make arrangements for me to call him collect. By arrangement, I meant that if he could persuade his mother to allow me to make a call. I was hopeful that she would say yes, but apparently she is a lot more angry than I thought. The question is why is she so angry at me when she is the one who took our son away without even telling me where they were going. It could have been possible for me to never have seen my son again, but by the grace of God. The only thing I can come up with for here feeling the way she does about me now is that she is not at all happy about the fact that I'm not sending her any child support payments. Apparently, her emotional state has discouraged my son from contacting me. I shudder to think what kind of monster she is making me into. I can't fault my son for obeying her but I sure wish he would not be so obedient to her even when she has no way of knowing. It would be our little secret. My son, the good son. That's what I wanted, right? Anyway, I am continuing to send him emails expressing my love and affection to him regardless of him not replying to them. As long as he knows I am trying to remain in contact with him, I feel better about the whole thing. It's kind of like knowing he's safe and sound in the next room, even though I can't see him, or hear his voice. He knows I'm near. That's the important thing.

Week 7 (11-4 to 11-10)

On Sunday night while I was on duty at the monitor's desk in front of the program director's office, I got an idea for a short story. It's interesting because I was telling a guy here about 3

weeks ago that one of my writing weaknesses was composing fictional stories. Sure, I could write fictional things, like things pertaining to my life but when it came down to me writing creatively, I simply couldn't come up with anything that I thought would be worthy. I would get writer's block before finishing the first paragraph. On this particular night, after listening to gospel music and meditating on the Lord, I got this sudden urge to write a short story. The idea really stemmed from a thought I had about God's character as it related to the old and new testaments of the bible. The old testament is God's official position regarding sin, and it characterizes His abhorrence of it in no uncertain terms. The message is as clear as a bell. The new testament, on the other hand, characterizes His official position regarding how he chooses to address the punishment for sin, In the former, His judgments are sudden, wrathful, and stern. While in the latter, His judgments are tempered with grace and longsuffering. I have often wondered why many believers have often felt that somehow God's official position regarding sin had changed, as though He had actually softened to sin because of the introduction of the new testament. Yes, He has changed the way that He addresses sin but not the way He feels about it. He still hates it. I then decided to write about a make-believe person whose struggle would characterize both the old and new testaments. She would feel one way about something initially but after the story would progress, she would address those feelings in a different manner. However, she would never stop feeling the way she felt about the thing as she did initially.

She would always hate it, and be hurt by the use of it. I then started to think of an old woman with lots of children. She loved her children dearly but an outside influence would make her children disobedient and badly mannered. I am also beginning to realize this one particular thing that has shadowed my stay here. In addition to my experience at the Gwinnett County Jail, I am continuing in my quest to live the rest of my life as Douglas, instead of Doug. I have had some very interesting moments regarding my insistence on using my full name. About 2 weeks into my recovery as I was participating in an AA meeting I was led to tell about the duality of my character and how it had affected my life. I talked about how my character nemesis Doug had virtually stifled my alter-ego Douglas into oblivion. I talked about how everything negative in my life mostly had to do with Doug, and not Douglas. I ended up with talking about my experience in the GCJ and how I had come there to commit a murder, the murder of my nemesis in fact, and how I had committed the murder in the dark recesses of my cell. Actually, I drew a picture of my nemesis hanging on a cross underneath my bed. I wouldn't be surprised if it was still there. My intention was to keep him nailed to that cross forever. Unfortunately, I didn't use the right kinds of nails because he slipped back down off of it. The truth of the matter is that my recovery has to do with how successful I am in nailing him back on that cross, and making sure he stays there ... forever. I am constantly having to correct guys that use the name Doug simply because that's how they refer to the other guys they know named Douglas. They all understand my situation and how important it is for me to disassociate myself with that person. During our bible study classes the story of Jacob fighting with the Angel of God always seems to come up. The essence of the story has to do with the struggle Jacob puts up with the angel, and how the angel honors Jacob's struggle with him by changing his name to Israel, signaling a new era of God's covenant with his chosen people. How this story parallels my life is in the way God has given me revelation to receive this biblical construct as evidence of a new beginning for me, a new era of a new covenant between me and God.

On the surface, and to anybody lacking scriptural discernment, this name change may seem rather unimportant and even meaningless but to me it is the most important thing to happen to me since I first received Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. This is truly a monumental phase of my life. It is indeed my rebirth. It is also spiritual boundary line that I am crossing just as Jacob crossed over into the land where God would ultimately use him and bless him when he wrestled the angel. So too, my name change signals a crossing over into my spiritual self that will ultimately fulfill God's purpose for my life. You might want to parallel my struggling with my flesh with Jacob's struggle with the angel and prevailing. I truly believe that I have defeated, or at least subdued my old man securely back up on the cross. And just as the angel touched the thigh of Jacob and brought it out of joint with Jacob continuing to wrestle with him, so too have my struggles with my flesh disjointed me from my family, friends, livelihood, prosperity, and romance; to name a few. However, like Jacob, I continued to wrestle without diminishing my faith, or silencing my prayers. In this endeavor I am victorious. God has saw fit to honor me with a new beginning by calling forth the person he initially gave the name Douglas, calling him forth from the tomb of drugs and alcohol into the marvelous light of preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. I know this new beginning will not be absent of trials and tribulations but it will be absent of drug and alcohol abuse, and use, period. Also, I'm sure that just because I have succeeded in nailing my nemesis back up on the cross, this new illumination will not spare me from a great fight of afflictions. However, I must endure them and achieve my calling to fulfill God's purpose for my life. You might say that my life as it existed before was the preparatory phase. My life as it exists now is the phase where I put everything I've learned into practice. This means that not only should I be about speaking the word, I have to be about living the word. The word has got to be in me, and not just spoken by me.

Since I've been here in the program, the question of me getting more involved into leading the morning devotionals has come up several times. Each time the question or request is presented to me I always offer what I believe to be a plausible answer to them, stating that I would much rather allow the guys that feel a strong calling on their life to lead. They usually give me that kind of side-eyed look of disbelief but I always continue to maintain my position. Fortunately, we have no shortage of guys that are more than willing to get up there and lead the devotionals whether they are prepared or not, the latter mostly being the case. Privately, when this question comes up, I have always rested in my conviction that I would probably do more harm than good trying to lead a devotional with these guys. The truth of the matter is that I have put so much time and energy in trying to develop and maintain a sophisticated and learned manner of speech that I very easily lose control over what comes out of my mouth. In my effort to explain myself, I oftentimes use words that tend to more efficiently convey what I'm trying to say, in the most economic way I can say it. However, efficiency doesn't necessarily translate to the needs of the unlearned who may require a lot of simpler words to convey a much simpler idea or concept. I often fall flat on my face when I try to achieve this delicate balance. I stink at it actually because I have tried so hard in my life to escape simple minds and simple minded people. That's the truth of the matter. Yes, I'm guilty of it and I don't know how to get around it. The best way I've discovered to do this is through writing, and most times even this isn't "dumbed-down" enough for some. Take a short story I finished writing several days ago.

Since I started writing it initially to entertain and test the biblical knowledge of some of the guys here, I was trying to pay particular attention to writing it as grammatically unchallenging to them as possible. After all, the story seemed very simple to me, even elementary. I guess you can imagine how surprised I was when I went to the director to get his approval for conducting a devotional class based on my story. After he had read it, he told me that he thought it was fine but that it was too long, and too complicated. The story was only 5 pages long, and included no complex sentences or ideas. I had tried to write a story that paralleled certain parts of the bible in very obvious ways but without using the names of the biblical characters. According to the director, I had failed miserably at accomplishing my intended goal. After several rewrites, I finally got his complete agreement but the intended purpose of the story had been sacrificed. By the time I got through with the rewrite, there was no reason to conduct the class. Hell, where was the mystery? There was nothing left to think about. I had tried to engage them in thinking but in the process, had forgotten just who my intended audience was. These guys were what was left after being traumatized for years by the devastating effects of drugs and alcohol abuse. They were not a class of guys who were my equal, or even close to being equal with me intellectually. What was I thinking? After this realization, I resolved myself to never pursue matters like this again while I was in here. That's why it's so hard for me to be myself here because I have to constantly concern myself about how these guys are perceiving what I'm saying. I've learned that using curse words at someone isn't the only way of offending. Sometimes people are offended by the choice of words one uses, particularly when the words used suggest to the person they are stupid if they don't know the meaning of the word. This can infuriate them in ways that are hard to correct if not handled very delicately.

I am constantly trying to dumb down my conversation and my thinking so that I don't offend the sensibilities of these guys. However, it doesn't mean I'm successful at it because just as it's hard to conceal ignorance, it's also hard to conceal one's intelligence, especially for prolonged periods of time. I sometimes feel like my intelligence is a wild animal trying to escape from a cage it has no desire to remain in. No doubt, I'm pushing it to the limit. One of the things I am trying to avoid is doing a lot of talking about the gospel of Jesus Christ. Of course talking about the word has its advantages and its place but at this stage of my life I want to let my life do the talking for me. I don't want to have to constantly tell people I'm a Christian with my mouth, symbols, or tradition. I want my behavior and my character to do the talking for me. I want there to be such an unmistakable spiritual aura about me that it will leave anyone who comes into contact with me having no doubt that I must be a true Christian, and not just someone hiding behind a façade of talk, symbols, and traditions. If this isn't the case, then I must be doing something wrong. It's interesting that most of the guys here profess to be Christians but unless you hear them reciting scripture or participating in bible study and devotions you would not think that they knew Christ at all. It would seem that to them it's all a matter of symbols and talk that makes one a Christian and that it is no longer necessary to live that way because we are forgiven all our sins, past and future, through God's grace. Even in here guys use their knowledge of scripture to separate themselves from the pack, and equate this knowledge as godliness, just like they do in the church. Most of those who do this also justify their use of profanity and vulgarity with the same argument as if God's grace gives them a right to continue living the very same way they did before they came to call of Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

These are the same guys that insist on leading the morning devotionals and bible studies regardless of how damaging their contrary ways are to the gospel. To me at least, this is a sure sign of spiritual immaturity and, to an extent, a mockery of Christianity. What these guys don't seem to understand is that people are paying more attention to how they live their lives than what comes out of their mouths and, if they are persuaded by their rhetoric, that it's alright to behave in such a manner because of grace, thereby continuing the spread of this kind of practice. This is a lie straight from the pit of Hell, and is potentially threatening to evangelical pursuits. Our behavior as Christians may be the only bible some people ever read, and if we don't allow them to see the character of Jesus Christ we may as well be living without Him. Our religion is in vain. Scripture points out the following:

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

**23** For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: **24** For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

James 1:22-24 (KJV)

**1** O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? **2** This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? **3** Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? **4** Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if *it be* yet in vain. **5** He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, *doeth he it* by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

Gal 3:1-5 (KJV)

This is the very same issue that Jesus had with the Scribes and Pharisees when he condemned them for failing to practice what they preached. I have decided that I will talk less, and act more when it comes to preaching the word of God. I want these guys here to see Christ's character in me more than hear me talking or preaching to them about it. That's what everybody is doing and I don't want to waste my time doing the very same thing. I have always seen myself as being a renaissance man regarding how I viewed the world and now is no time to stop. This may be the very reason why God has chosen me to do what he wants me to do. I have always felt that I was before my time. I can't explain why I've felt this way but I always thought I had this something that nobody else around me seemed to have. Anyway, it makes me feel very special. Now I must use that special something to do the work God has for me to do.

On Friday of this week as I was coming in from an appointment at the health department downtown across from Grady hospital I ran into a very dear friend of mine from college. His name is Maurice and we were as thick as thieves back then. Well, at least we were on the

college campus, which is actually all of the free time a serious student really has. Maurice is from Goldsboro, North Carolina and came down to Atlanta with his two brothers. He and one of his brothers attended the same community college as I did. The other brother, who was more closer to my age, worked as a data entry technician for a local bank. After awhile, they all became like brothers to me and helped to make my college life a lot livelier. Unfortunately, Maurice and I were separated when I started to take my pre-engineering classes at another campus of the same college. He soon left school altogether so that he could support his child that he had with its mother. He had gotten her to come down from North Carolina so that they could be a family. No doubt he was beginning to feel very lonely, being so far away from home. Heck, I was born and raised in Atlanta with all my family here and I was feeling very lonely myself. It actually came as no surprise to me when he opted to drop out and get a job. He had said they he would go back and finish up later but he never did. Over the years, before I left Atlanta because of my drug abuse problem, I would go by his apartment to drop in on him. After I started staying with Caroline, my sweetheart, she and I would go by to say hello and just hang out together. I felt we were beginning to grow farther and farther apart. I think he was very possessive of his daughter's mother and didn't like it when she would warm up to me, as if she felt comfortable with me around.

I think my friend Maurice was maybe a bit of a tyrant and control freak and she welcomed any opportunity to change this situation in her home. I could read it plainly as well. One night while we were playing chess it all came to a head. I had stopped by and I could tell he and her had probably been in a big argument. As usual, I was beating him pretty good and talking about it when he told me he didn't want to play anymore, and that I should leave. I obliged him immediately and left. That was the last time I saw him until Friday. Over the years since then, I had tried to contact him but was never able to. When I came back to Atlanta back in 1994, I ran into his oldest brother that was still working at the bank. We talked briefly and he left me Maurice's phone number. Maurice had moved out in the Stone Mountain area with his family. I called him once one night to chat with him but we only talked very briefly as well. I think I had told him I would come out to visit him but I never contacted him again because I lost the phone number. That was thirteen years ago. As I was walking past one of the places he and I used to hang out at downtown, I just happened to look in the window. I did a double take when I saw a face that reminded me of his. I stopped dead in my tracks and reversed my direction, starring intently at the face that was starring back at me. I took off my sun glasses and made a big smile at him to show him a more familiar face. He acknowledged me and we both moved towards one another and embraced in a big hug. I don't know about him, but I was so glad to see him. It was a moment I had waited for a very long time. We had so much to catch up on. As we embraced, I couldn't help but notice that my friend had lost a little weight, and his appearance was rather dull, a sign that he had seen some rather hard times. We quickly digressed back to the past, where we both felt more comfortable, and began recollecting some of the things we did together back then.

He and another guy had been eating when I interrupted them. We walked to the other guy's car together and I hand to guy my digital camera to take some photos of me and my friend. We parted with me getting Maurice's email address and promising to contact him very soon. I walked back to the recovery facility so delighted at what had just transpired with a big smile on

my face and in my heart. Yes, I like being this person Douglas because it gives me more of a chance to be alive, and right now I want to be alive more than ever.

#### Week 8 (11-11 to 11-17)

I found out on Monday night that I was scheduled to leave for the Carpenter's House for the next phase of the program on Tuesday morning. Now it was time to step out on faith in the direction that the Lord was calling me. The discovery of my son has put everything in a different perspective for me, and has basically signaled a change in direction for me. During the time I have been here, I have tried to use each moment as wisely as possible regarding my recovery. However, I prefer to refer to it as my deliverance because that's the only thing that can save me from myself. God is calling me into a different direction and is making it loud and clear to me in so many ways. Doors are beginning to open for me just as I knew they would if He was calling me. How can I help but heed His call? I spoke with the director hours before I was supposed to transfer to tell him of my intentions. He seemed disappointed, as expected, and asked me when I had come to this decision. I told him I had come to it several weeks ago but had been negligent in telling him because I didn't think I would be leaving so soon. There were a lot of guys that hadn't been transferred who had been here longer than me. He then asked me why I wanted to leave and I told him that since I had found my son it had changed everything and his mother was being an obstacle between the two of us because I was not sending her child support payments. I felt that I simply could not hurt my son at the very moment he expects to have this long awaited relationship with his dad. I made my position clear, and stood there in humility and asked if I could go into the work dorm. He told me I could not, but that he would try to help me get into another program where I could work. This is exactly what I was waiting on him to say so I quickly, and humbly asked him if he would do it.

He agreed and told me to come to his office the next morning so he could have me to speak with his contact at the work program. I had already heard about this program and several of the guys who didn't want to go to the next phase of the recovery program had ended up there. This place was located right in the heart of one of the biggest drug infested areas in the city but it was also familiar territory to me. I had friends and relatives located nearby. A lot of the guys didn't want to go there because of this. I had made up in my mind that if that's what it took, then that's what I was going to do. I also felt that if God's hand was in it, He would maybe make a way for me to go to a different place than this one, a far better place. The next day arrived and before the director could assist me as he had intended, one of the volunteers, who had also been a client there, had stopped by to see him about something. This guy was one of the many clergy who stopped by to volunteer their time to give us guys an encouraging word of the gospel, or of recovery, which is one and the same to me. I happened to be working as a monitor at the desk in front of the director's office anyway so when the guy came out of his office, the director beamed for me to speak with the guy about his transitional house. I told him my situation, along with what I did for a living, and he told me that he would have a guy leaving the house on Friday and that he would come over to pick me up then. He said we could then begin using some of his resources to help me find a temporary job until I got something in my field. I asked him if we had a deal, and he said we did so I victoriously

walked back to my post, amazed at how God worked that out. Soon afterwards, I went online to see where I house was located, and to my great delight, it was located out in the suburbs in a very nice area, for the most part, but close enough to commercial areas to not feel isolated. This was God's hand, I thought to myself, and now was the time to make my move, literally.

On Thursday I went downtown on a pass just to do some writing and hang out. I had made arrangements with Maurice to meet up with him around 2pm at a location in Woodruff park where folks sat around playing chess. It would appear he had lots of free time to play because he wasn't working a steady job. We met around the appointed time and I offered to buy us both a hot meal. I really wanted to be in a quiet place where we could talk freely, and for a long length of time without the management running us out. This eliminated fast food restaurants. We sat and ate our meal talking about some of the times we had in college. I really wanted to make Maurice feel comfortable about opening up to me so I let him do most of the talking while I listened eagerly. I could tell he had a lot of things weighing on him and that he wanted to bounce them off of someone, anyone who would listen probably. At times he would venture into very emotionally charged memories where he thought in had been done a grave injustice. I sympathized with him with my eyes and continued to listen. What I had expected him to say, he ended up not saying it at all. I had expected him to tell me his sad story about how smoking crack cocaine had all but destroyed his life, and livelihood. I had expected him to have had some of the same experiences I had with smoking crack and drinking alcohol. Maybe he was holding back for another time when he felt more comfortable around me but he did volunteer that he had smoked crack in a Marianna joint but had never smoked it in a pipe. Without telling him so, I didn't believe that story at all. No one really has that kind of choice with smoking crack although a lot of folks claim to do it. Personally, I have never seen anyone preferring to smoke crack that way when there was at least one pipe around. You only did that when you didn't have a pipe because it was considered by virtually everyone to be a waste of dope. I pretended to believe his claim in order to avoid putting him on the spot. After all, I was trying to make him feel he didn't have to hide anything from me.

I came to realize that the split Maurice had had with his ex-wife had been much harder to deal with than he lead me to believe. Yes, he and his child's mother had married and had another child as well. I don't think they were married when I last saw him, however, I forgot to ask him. I remember seeing how interested and focused he was when I was telling him about what I had gone through emotionally when Carolyn and I had split up. I saw him captivated with a look of empathy as I unwound the tragic and heartfelt struggle I had to endure over many years when she let me know it was over. I told him how I had cried practically every night for years, longing for her, needing to touch her, to smell her breath, her body scent. I told him how I dreamt about her as well, every night, unable to hold her in the dream because as soon as I would, I would awaken. I told him how I had been willing to make a deal with God to only exist in my dreams if it meant I could be with her forever. I told him how this tortured my soul beyond measure and drove me to the deepest recesses of a life overwhelmed by drugs and alcohol. Yes, I had paid dearly for offending one of God's precious children and I would continue to pay for it years later, even after I cleaned my life up. Even today when I have dreams of her, I awaken with a longing in my heart. I will always love her. Always! I still see her in the faces of younger women who bear a similarity to her, unintentionally taunting me with the reality of never being given another chance to be with her at such a young age. The impossibility of it all

slaps me in the face with the force of a runaway locomotive. Why must I continue to be tortured by her some twenty years later? I could see he clearly understood my agony, and would frequently look off into the distance as though he were experiencing his own agonizing trials through what I was telling him.

I then showed him my writ of certiorari document which I downloaded from an official US Supreme Court library site on the web. After all the time we have known each other, I have yet to let him know how close we had come to never meeting at all. Had it not been for what happened as a result of this document, my life would have been very different from what it became. This one single document would be open doors that would never have been open for me. In effect, it changed my life in a way that I am still trying to come to terms with.

Well, today is Friday and the guy wasn't able to come get me because, according to the director, he was having a gas leak problem at the transition house, or somewhere, and would be by to get me on Saturday morning. I didn't ask for the details because I was glad the director didn't mind me staying for another day. After all, he felt he owed me that much. The reason is because I had been playing some gospel music on my laptop when the director shouts for me to turn the volume up so he could better listen to the song being played. I quickly obliged. He then asked me if I could put that song on his PC and I told him I would need to get a storage device called a thumb drive. He offered to pay for it if I went to get it and while I was thinking about where I could get one, it dawned on me that the guy from the transition house was supposed to be coming by. I brought it to the director's attention and we both held off on doing buying one at that time. I then thought to simply use the blank CD I had in my drawer and rushed in to tell him I would burn him that song along with some others that I had. He liked the idea and told me to proceed. After I burned it, he was very satisfied and thanked me with a smile. He then asked if I needed him to make the phone call to the guy from the transition house. I knew then that he was trying to show his appreciation for what I had done. I was pleased at this because if anything went wrong with me moving out on Saturday, at least I could probably get some grace from the director to stay until the guy was ready for me to move in, however long that might have taken.

Saturday morning found me very optimistic about the move and I went up to the third floor in front of the director's office just to get some personal quiet time. I simply wanted to be alone with the Lord, and minister to myself with gospel songs while waiting for the call that the guy was on his way to pick me up. Well, around 1pm a call came in from the guy and I was told that he would be here to pick me up around 3pm. I relaxed and decided to take another hour of fellowshiping with the Lord before getting my things together. Around 1:50pm I see his van pulling into the parking lot. I know it's him and I rush down to meet him and coyly said to him that I was expecting him at 3pm. He said he was pushed for time and had to make adjustments but thought I would be ready anyway since he was supposed to come by yesterday. I opted to bow out of the conversation because the last thing I wanted to do was get involved in a moot conversation. He was here, and I would be ready. That was what mattered most at the time. On the way to the house, or rather the apartment, I was told to expect to get up the next day, Sunday, to go to two services at his church, to be followed by a big meal at a restaurant. Now this I really had no argument with. I wanted to go to church, anybody's church, in a huge way. Interestingly, he seemed to say it as if he expected some amount of

apprehension, or resistance from me. He had no idea. When he started talking about going to church I knew then and there that I was going to the right place. Praise the Lord! I don't think I have ever so much anticipation about going to church. I moved in, met the fellows, and settled down into this largely unstructured apartment environment where I could come and go as I pleased, finally. In spite of my new-found freedom, I decided to stay in for the rest of the day and catch up on some phone calls. The place has long distance calling, cable TV, DVD, VCR, and a food allotment, compliments of the owner. I only share a room with one other person and it's in a separate bed, not a bunk bed. The Marta station is about 3 blocks away as a bonus. Yes, this was definitely a good move.