

# Colossians 2:13-17

Sunday 12/30/2007

## I. Freedom from Old Testament Ordinances

*Colossians 2:13*

*And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;*

*Colossians 2:14*

*Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;*

*Colossians 2:15*

*And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.*

*Colossians 2:16*

*Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days:*

*Colossians 2:17*

*Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.*

This is the passage we talked about Thursday night. Rob asked a question, and we wound up here talking about some things. This is where you want to go in your Bible. This passage shows you that when Christ died on the cross, He did away with the Old Testament. There is no more law.

It also shows you that as a Christian, you are not accountable or responsible for any more holy days. This is why, for Christians, there are no holy days; every day is holy. If you are a child of God, God is living inside you. We have talked about this, and I am certainly not beating a dead horse, and you know my stand on it, but this is why Christmas has never been observed down through the history of the New Testament church, nor has Easter.

This is why Christians always shunned away from birthdays. There are only two birthdays in the Bible, and in both cases, somebody got killed. I am not saying it is wrong to celebrate a birthday; you know me, I am always looking for a party. But the bottom line is this: you do not want to ever put more emphasis on the first birthday than you do the second birthday.

In our kids and our grandkids, and in my own life, we celebrate the physical birth when we come in because we are glad our kids were born, and they are the joy of our life. But we also celebrate their spiritual birthday. I celebrate mine, the kids celebrate theirs, Barb celebrates hers. Barb keeps getting re-saved, so she keeps getting more presents. She has got nine spiritual birthdays. That is so wrong, isn't it, honey?

Anyway, Lent goes out the window, all the things that go along with it, all the stuff that we count as holy days. There are none for a Christian. That does not mean you cannot observe them and go along with the flow of things, but you need to understand that all those things, there are no things that we are held accountable to now other than the Word of God.

## II. The Unknown God and Modern Christianity

I have been in the Bible and dealing with people for many, many years now. After watching Christians, pastors, churches, and my own life, I have come to one very true conclusion. There are a lot of things that I am not sure of in life. I am sure of the Bible, but there are a lot of things I am not sure of, a lot of things I could not give you a definitive answer on. But I will tell you one thing I have observed over the years, and I know this to be absolutely true, and I put myself in this category. I have come to the conclusion that very little of what we do as Christians has very much to do with anything that God wants. I really believe that. I believe that at the end of our lives, we are going to find that we just were someplace else where God was not.

I think that if I have learned anything watching churches, watching Christians, watching the way people are, I have learned that most of the things that we think God is in, He is a hundred million miles around. That is why I try to keep this church so in touch and in line with the Bible, because there is the only real answer. Obviously, if you lose the Bible, you lose all point of reference.

I remember reading back in Acts chapter 17. Acts chapter 17 is a great passage, and it deals with Paul going to Athens. If you ever read the story, and it is worth reading sometime, I will not take the time to read it this morning because I want to move through this pretty quickly. But you will find that Paul comes up against the Athenians. The Athenians were a bunch of Greeks from Athens. This is where Paul is kind of checking things out there, and he preaches his famous sermon on Mars Hill. He says to the Athenians, "You know what?" He says, "You guys," and when he comes down there and he gets up to preach, he says, "I walked through you and I heard your devotions. And there is a description on the God that you are worshipping." He said, "You know what that description is? To the unknown God."

I read that probably 30 or 40 years ago and put it in the context of the book of Acts. But I must confess, I never thought in all the years that I would ever live long enough to see the body of Christ, true, saved, born-again people that thought and believed just like the Athenians did in Acts chapter 17. Christians today, most of God's people—I hope you are not one of them—but most of God's people, they are worshipping the unknown God. They have no idea who God is. They have no idea what pleases God. We talked about that a couple of weeks ago; it blew my mind. They have no idea of the basic things in God. Yet here we are claiming to be Christians, claiming to be leaders, claiming to be this, claiming to be that, when we do not even understand the very basics of what it takes.

The Athenians, he comes down through there and he says they heard him preach, and he said, "He brings strange things to our ears." You know what the strange things were he was preaching? The truth. The truth had become strange things to people's ears. He comes down through there and he says, "What new doctrine is this?" It was not a new doctrine; it was the same doctrine that

was preached all down through the Old Testament in a basic form. There were 500 prophecies in the Old Testament alone that testified to the doctrine that he was preaching. But you see, that is where God's people are at today.

When Paul comes down through there and preaches his message, and it is a great outline if you ever want to preach it, he preaches seven things that are wrong with them. This is not a message today; I just kind of want to come through here to show you that we today, as God's people, we worship the unknown God. We do not know Him. We really do not know Him.

Paul comes down through there and he says:

1. You are in idolatry.
2. You are ignorant of the Word of God.
3. You operate in fear and gossip, and you are all running around wanting to hear some new thing.

Boy, if that is not pastors today! Every new idea comes out to build a better church, to reach more people. They dump what they had before and get something else. Everything else new will not replace the old Book and just standing up and preaching it. Somebody says, "I want to reach people." The Bible says, Jesus said Himself—you do not have to get it from a second source—He said it Himself:

*John 12:32*

*And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.*

Lift Him up; do not throw Him under the bus, lift Him up.

4. He says, "You are superstitious."

Well, that is God's people.

5. He says, "You take an agnostic approach."

Now, an agnostic and an atheist are two different things. An atheist—you have to break down the word—"a" is our word for "against." A "theist," the word for God in the Greek is *\*theos\**. So we get our word "theology." So an atheist is someone who is against theology, against God. He is an atheist. The Greek word for God is *\*theos\**; he is against God. An agnostic is, *\*gnostic\** is knowledge. Where does our word "knowledge" come from? "Ag" is again, no, "against." So an agnostic is someone who is against the knowledge of God. That can be a saved person.

6. He says they worship in ignorance.
7. The last thing he says is, "You are steeped in philosophy."

It always amazed me that these people were unsaved people. But that is a yardstick for me in the Bible because we have come full circle. Now today, in Bible Christianity, the body of Christ has come full circle and is where the Athenians were at in Acts chapter 17. That is exactly the way it is. We are in idolatry. We worship things more than we do God. We are totally ignorant of the Word of God. We are always afraid. We gossip. We always want to hear a new thing. We are

superstitious. We take an agnostic approach. We say we love the Word of God, but we just never bother reading it or applying it. We worship in ignorance, and we are steeped in philosophy. Of course, that is the Athenians in Acts chapter 17, and that is the body of Christ in 2008.

When you understand how this whole thing works, and you begin to see how this thing lays itself out, and that we are free from the holy days, you are free to worship Christmas or not worship Christmas. I do not judge you one way or the other. Some of God's people are vegetarians; they swear by eating on the vegetarian diet. I do not have a problem with that. Some people say, "Well, I like to eat meat." I do not have a problem with that. I never judge you because of those things, because you have that liberty in Christ. That is not a doctrinal thing. We are not under the law. The Bible says, "Let no man judge you to eat or drink." You can eat and drink whatever you want. I do not have a right to judge you. If somebody says, "Well, I do not drink coffee," that is fine. Do not get on me because I do.

I had to say one time, he said, "You should not drink coffee." I said, "Why not?" He says, "Well, it is against the Word of God." I said, "Well, I said, 'I should not drink coffee?'" I said, "You are telling me that you do not drink coffee?" I said, "You should have a better relationship with God and the Word of God." I said, "Yes, I do. You want to sit down and talk about the Bible with me?" He did not. His coffee would not have helped him. Their lack of coffee would not have helped me. People are nuts, are they not?

### III. The Significance of New Year's

There is one day in the Bible that I think is very important. That is the day in the Bible that was observed in the Old Testament, and the parallels come right into where we are at today. That is the day that is coming up tomorrow, and that is New Year's. Did you ever see that in the Bible? Did you ever see the big deal that God made out of New Year's? Exodus 23:16, 1 Kings 8:2, someplace in there.

Let me tell you how that thing works. If you go to Exodus chapter 12, here is what you will find. You will find that this is the definitive pivotal point for the nation of Israel. They have been down in Egypt for 430 years. You can trace their lineage all the way back to about 1918 BC with Abraham when he is called out of Ur of the Chaldees. Now, coming down through all this period of time in Genesis, they go down into Egypt, and then a new Pharaoh, who knew not Joseph, and they get put under bondage and all down through this thing.

Now we come to Exodus chapter 12, and in Exodus chapter 12, God changes the whole concept of Israel. Up to Exodus chapter 12, the nation of Israel started the beginning of their year with the Feast of Tabernacles, which is September or October, depending on how the calendar falls. In Exodus 12:1-2, it is clearly plain that God changes the beginning of their year. What you find is before Exodus chapter 12, God counts the beginning of their year from the creation of the world. We studied this Thursday night a couple of weeks ago; we went through that thing on the birth of Christ, and I showed you how the four days being off and that four days is the Feast of Tabernacles and in the orbit and all that stuff.

Up to that point, Exodus chapter 12, they started their year on the birth of planet Earth and all that God did. From Exodus chapter 12 on, they no longer follow that. Now it becomes April, the Passover. In Exodus chapter 12, God says, "I am changing the start of your year. Where your year once started from October, September, now it is going to start in April." There is a reason why He changed that, and I think it is very important for you and I to see that and understand it if we are going to make the parallels.

September and October represented the physical birth of planet Earth. It represented the physical creation that God had made. But now they are about ready to come out of Egypt, and they are going to come out under the blood of a lamb. That is in chapter 12. They are going to take the blood of a lamb that is without spot, a picture of Christ. They are going to put it on the side post and the top of the door, and God is going to bring them out of Egypt. You see? So they become a new creature in Christ Jesus. At that point, God changes their year because from that point on, it is not dealing with the physical birth of the creation; it is dealing with the redemption of a nation. Wow! What an incredible concept.

#### IV. Personal Reflection and Spiritual Growth

Now, when you take that concept and you look at it as it applies to you and me, you also realize that from that point on, the Jew based everything he did around that period of time. It was a period of time that we know as the crucifixion of Christ. When you put it all together, there are some great parallels here that you and I need to see. It is the parallel of our life as God's children. We ought to have a point where we look back and reflect on our lives.

I think that New Year's—did you ever stop to analyze New Year's? Christmas is over. We start the New Year, and we start the whole process of life again, as the book of Ecclesiastes talks about. But for me, New Year's, our New Year's, always has been a reality check. I understand totally and completely the psychology why everybody goes out and gets smashed and drunk on New Year's. Because New Year's, if you are any kind of human being at all, if you have any kind of sensitivity at all, you have to stop and look and reflect on where you have been, where you are at, and what you have to look forward to next year. In most people, it is the same old quagmire, the same old mud, the same old problems, the same old this, the same old that. So they just go out and get blind, staggering drunk so they do not have to think about the misery they are in. I am telling you, there is a psychology behind that, and they want to forget.

Job said in Job chapter 32, "I said, they should speak of the multitude of years should teach wisdom." I think that New Year's, every child of God, ought to stop and reflect back and understand: What did you learn this year? What do you know this year about God that you did not know when you were here last year? I understand that some of you have just come in the last couple of weeks, the last couple of months, and you get a free pass on this one. But if you have been here a year, I do not care how basic you are or where you work, you have got to have learned something. Your years with God, he says it: "I said, they should speak, and the multitude of years should teach wisdom." You know what? The older you get, the more you should know about God and the Word of God, not less. The older you get, the less you should be stuck in your ways. But yet I see God's people that are absolutely stuck in their ways. They are 30, 40, 50, 60

years old; they are never going to change. They are making the same mistakes over and over and over again.

About a month and a half ago, I had a couple that came in; they were not part of our church, and somebody referred them to me. I sat down, and they had some real issues in their life. We talked for probably three or four sessions and tried to work them out. At the end, I tried to give them a plan and a situation where they came back, and the last night they said, "Well, this is what we are going to do. This is what we are going to..." I said, "Hey, look, the bottom line is this: you can have all the great plans in the world, but if you do not change your lifestyle, what needs to change, it is all just a smoke dream. It is all going to dissipate, and it is all going to bring you right back because you are not solving the problems. All you are doing is treating the symptoms." That is what we like to do as God's people. We never want to learn, and we do not take the time to learn back at the last year to see what I have learned and what God has done for me this year.

*Psalm 77:10*

*And I said, This is my infirmity: but I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High.*

I know that is a great verse. Remember the years of the right hand. The right hand in your Bible is Jesus Christ. He sits at the right hand of God the Father, and He is called God's right arm. He is called His right hand. You have heard somebody say, "Boy, that guy is a great guy. That guy and I are so tight. I would cut off my right arm for that guy." Have you ever heard that? Well, that is what God did for you. He loved you so much, He cut off His right arm; that right arm was Jesus Christ. Of course, He says, "Remember the years of the right hand." That is somebody remembering, thinking about the things that they have learned and they have done after they have been saved.

The devil makes sure that you and I get so busy with everything else we have going that we do not have time to think about God or what God is doing or what God wants to do. We find ourselves year after year after year after year going through the same routines, being in the same rut, same problems, same quagmire, nothing changes. You will work yourself to death. You are so busy running here and running there to cover the mistakes that you made and all the stuff that goes along with it. Somewhere in the process, God just gets squeezed out.

Little Maddie and Kenzie got a hamster. I bought it for them. I went over to Steve and Nikki's and saw they had a hamster. Their kids loved it. I got the idea, "My kids will love my hamster." We went out to the hamster store. I never knew there were such issues with hamsters. I thought you just got a hamster. Man, buying a hamster is like finding a wife. They are temperamental. No comparison between a wife now, but I am just saying. They are temperamental. There is a whole issue. I thought you just went in and you got a little hamster. He loved you. He just looked at you and twiddled his nose and did all kinds of things. No, there are whole books on hamster ownership. It takes longer to get a hamster than it does to get a gun, and hamsters are more dangerous. They bite you. You get home, and they will run all over the house. Some people do not find them for weeks. They say, "You know, I get a hamster." Then there is a whole thing: when you get a hamster, bring it home, play with it in the bathtub, minus the water, but that way

he cannot get up the side, you see. And do not hold them too tight. So many things to learn. I thought you just got a hamster, and he hamstered, and everybody was happy. No, no, there is a whole world of hamsters.

Every time I go out there, they keep it upstairs in the room. Every time I go upstairs, the hamster is doing the same thing. He gets a little wheel, and he just runs that wheel. Hamsters are nocturnal; that means nighttime people. They sleep during the day, and they do things at night. He gets in that little wheel, and you just hear him running that wheel all night long. I walked by there the other day, and he was in there going to town like he was going somewhere. I look at God's people, and I see, you know what, we are just a bunch of hamsters. We are in a cage that we built. We have got a little wheel that we are running around in, and nothing ever changes. That is what New Year should be for.

*Psalm 90:9*

*For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told.*

Every life is a story. I cannot read Psalms 90 because Psalms 90, the next part of that verse, goes into the time that we are on Earth, threescore and ten. But I cannot read Psalm 90 without seeing the ominous overtones that every life is a story and a tale that will be told. I cannot help but miss the implications of the judgment seat of Christ. Someday, the story of your life and my life is going to be told. It is going to be told, and we are going to give an account of what we did with the years that God gave us.

The Bible says that you have threescore and ten; by Bible standard, that is 70. You have heard me say this before. Most of us did not get saved until we were 20, so that is 50. You sleep, believe it or not, in a normal lifestyle, probably 20 years. Well, that knocks off another 20. When you get right down to it, and you take all the time—in a lifetime, you eat five years. Just sitting down and eating your meal adds up in a lifetime to five years. Who would think about it? The bottom line is this: when it is all said and done, out of a normal 70 years, you probably have 10 or 15 good years to give God. It is all you have got. It is all you have got. And those years, the devil makes sure that we get a little cage, a little wheel, and just spin them going around. That is why some of you this year that were here a year ago or five years ago, or you have been a Christian for 10 or 20 years, you are in the same little rut you are in now than you were last year, and you will be in it next year. It is just the way that works. Here you are again, not one inch farther along spiritually, stuck in the same old mire.

We are just like the Athenians; we serve the unknown God. You think your God is one whom you do not know. You are just like this group. God's people today are just like the Athenians. I cannot believe how back in Acts chapter 17, the pagan Greek people at Athens, the Athenians, have now taken the place in the mindset of God's people today. We think as God's people that the God that we serve does not have any standard of holiness. We think we can just do whatever we want to do, and there is no accountability factor to it. We think we can live with whoever we want to live with, do whatever we want to do, go where we want to go, be where we want to be, and still show up at church with a big Christian smiley on your face and talk about how much you love

God. You serve an unknown God. That is where we are at. That is why you are in the mess you are still in.

We think the God that we serve is the one that allows you to live your life without accountability. We think the God that you serve and you have devotions to just does not care if you ever get involved in ministry. "Oh, it is no big deal. He understands." When I tell you He does not understand, you are serving the wrong God. You have got it backwards. Your God is one who, in your mind, just does not care that you did not do anything last year. He does not care that you are just in that little cage rowing around there doing this and doing that. He just says, "Oh, it is okay. They are good people." You think your God is one who, if I asked you to put you on the spot—this is one that I would not do that—"Give me 10 verses that you memorized and committed to memory last year." Ten. Ten. That is less than one a month. Ten. You could not give them, but you could give me a thousand excuses why you are in the same rut you are in right now. "Well, we just got to get things set up; things are busy. Well, we got there. Oh, it is always something." You know what changes? It changes when you understand who the real God is. We are worshipping the unknown God. Absolutely.

We do not need a New Year's resolution in some of our lives; we need a New Year's revolution. We do not need to make some promise that we are not going to keep. We need to have a revolution in our life to change the things about us that need to be changed. That is the problem. We have the best of intentions.

When I was a kid growing up, I was never very athletic, and I never played a lot of sports. I never understood, and to this day, the real key to playing sports is understanding sports. I do not understand the rules of sports; that just was not my deal. I remember when I was in the eighth grade, they put a thing on the bulletin board that they were going to start a school basketball team. I knew nothing about basketball, still know nothing about basketball. I remember I showed up, and there was a bunch of guys down there. I was an idiot when I was in the eighth grade, I mean, less than I am now, but I was an absolute idiot. I will never forget, I was out there on the court, and everybody was doing their layups, and they had an order to them, not me. I am out there dribbling around, running down, throwing the ball. The coach was standing there watching everything, and I am thinking, "He is watching me, man. He is going to put me on first string. This guy sees my potential." I was out there, and I was doing the dumbest stuff, faking half-court shots, and everything. I could not dribble the ball. I did not even know at that point you had to dribble; I just thought you ran with it. It was just goofy.

So he blows the whistle, and everybody lines up, and he says, "Alexander, come here." I am thinking, "Oh, this is what I am talking about. I am going to become this. He has seen my skill. He is going to take me alongside, and he is going to say, 'Son, you have got the most unbelievable skill buried in raw rock that I have ever seen in my life. If you let me work with you, I am going to make you into the great basketball scorer.'" I mean, that is how stupid I was. I thought he had seen my talent. What he did not see was my lack of talent. I will never forget, it was probably one of the most meaningful things that, looking back on it now, at the time I just blew it off. But looking back on it, I will never forget that day. Because he called me over, and I walk over there, you know, I am over there, I have got the ball in my hand, walking, everybody

is lined up, and I am walking up to him, and I say, "Yeah, coach." He says, "Let me ask you a question." I said, "Yes, sir." He says, "Do not you ever get tired being a jerk?" That is what he said to me. I thought to myself, "Yeah, I do get tired being a jerk," because I knew he was right. That was one of the greatest things anybody ever said to me. From that point on, I realized and began to see about myself the things that had to change.

I ask you the same question today in the same spirit. He meant it for my good; he was not being mean. He saw potential in me, not to be a basketball player, but he saw where I was headed as long as I had the mindset that I had. It was a cold shock of water in the face that I needed. So allow me to return the favor: Do not you ever get tired of going through another year without God using you? Does it not bother you that another year is going to slip by when you are just going to do nothing? Does it not ever bother you that year after year after year you come up with the same old excuses, the same old reasoning, the same old answers when nothing really is going to change? We have the best intentions.

I love the book of Psalms. The book of Psalms is very simply God's testimonies becoming David's testimonies.

*Psalm 119:11*

*Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.*

*Psalm 119:12*

*Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes.*

*Psalm 119:13*

*With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth.*

You know what he is saying? He is saying, "God, You teach me, and I will tell everybody about it. You do things in my life, and I will show everybody. I will show everybody what God has done. I will tell everybody what God has done for me." That is what he is saying.

*Psalm 119:27*

*Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: so shall I talk of thy wondrous works.*

There is somebody being showed of God and then telling other people what God has done for him. Incredible, incredible.

*Psalm 119:44*

*So shall I keep thy law continually for ever and ever.*

*Psalm 119:45*

*And I will walk at liberty: for I seek thy precepts.*

*Psalm 119:46*

*I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed.*

In your life, in my life, God does not really want us to speak before kings. He would just be happy if you just did it with your family, did it with the people you work with. But you see, that is where we are at today.

## V. Testimonies of God's Work

Today, the special thing about today is I am done. You have heard me all year. Last week you heard some men. I am going to open this up, and I have asked three people in particular to come up and just share what God has done with them in their life. Then I am going to open it up as time permits that if you are here this morning, you want to take a few minutes and you want to talk about what God has done in your life this last year, you do that. This church needs to verbalize what is happening in your life. This church needs to, if God has changed you this last year or changed you through the process, if you are in a place in your life where God is doing something in your life today, you understand the importance and the significance of it. Please use your own discretion because you know where you are at, and I know where you are at. Do not not be here for the last nine months and then show up today and want to give a testimony of the great thing God has done in your life. Save it. If you want my advice, go out here in the street in the middle of two highways and tell everybody as they drive by. But you know where you are at with God this morning.

I want our first one to come up, and Mark, I am not going to say anything about you until after you have said it because I do not want to ruin anything that God puts in your heart to say. But my first was going to be Mark.

*Mark's Testimony:*

*Some incredible things have happened in my life, in my family's life, in the last several months. I want to tell you that I was definitely the hamster in the wheel for 22 years. I was saved, and I had no victory. I was just running around that wheel. About three or four months ago, God sent a couple of special people into my life that kind of opened the door and let me climb out of that cage. It was Steve and Nikki. From that time, some incredible things have happened. Steve turned me on to the website, which has been a great tool. From there, I started downloading sermons and listening to them and some studies, and I had some problems with that, so that forced me to contact Bob. Then we got to talking, and as the progress happened, I started to fall in love with the Bible for the first time. I realized that you could have a relationship with God. For 22 years, I did not know that. For 22 years, no one ever sat me down and disciplined me. It took that time. What you guys have done now as a church, you come down and you spend time with us every Sunday. You have opened your hearts and your pocketbooks in many ways in our lives, and it is definitely an incredible thing. I actually can say that I love the Lord Jesus Christ, and I love that Bible. It is an incredible thing.*

*I always thought when I heard people say about the peace that surpasses all understanding, I always thought that when I heard people say that they love Jesus, I thought that was just a con to get you to come to church. I did not believe that that could really be because I never had that as*

*much as I thought I could. What I found was a secret: if you are not reading the Bible, if you are not spending time in God's Word, you will never have that. You will never get it. As soon as I started doing that, that is when I started to get it. Because of the ability Bob has to teach people how to divide the Word and simply see what you are reading and understanding it, all of a sudden, it starts to come alive.*

*One thing I have to say is that there is a big group of people that are getting missed in the world today. Not so much here, obviously, because you are the guys who turn it around, but something to hold in your hearts is when people get saved, and then you feel you have done your job, and you set them down and you go on with your life. That is the biggest mistake you can do for anybody, because that is what happened to me. It takes that individual bringing them up, nurturing them, showing them how to love the Lord. If you do not do that, you are going to lose a whole generation, just like I lost. For 22 years, I could have been doing some stuff. Thank God, I discovered a verse called "redeem the time," and that started a few months ago. So I am in a big hurry to redeem the time, and I am trying to find balance in my life, as Steven and Bob have encouraged me many times to do.*

*I will tell you that I have spent about 40 hours a week in the Bible since I got back into it, and probably a total of five or six hundred hours now in just a matter of three and a half months. That is quite a bit, and that is the balance they want me to find. But I am in a unique situation where I have got time on my hands, and I know that I am going to use that to my benefit and God's glory while I have got that time. I just want to thank you all for everything you have done for me and my family and our lives. I am looking forward to next year because I am really excited. I am waiting to find out what God wants me to do, what the next move I need to do is. I am waiting for that. I am an impatient guy, but I have learned that I am going to wait for the Lord to show me that. I am looking forward to seeing everybody. That is really all I have got. I just love you all. For the first time in my life, when people come up to me and hug me at church and tell me that they are glad to see me and they love me, I feel that that is real. I have only felt that here. You guys have got a great thing going on. I am just blessed to be a part of it. You guys are not going to get rid of me unless you shoot me. That is all I have got, guys. Love you guys.*

Joe, I do not want to put you on the spot, but if you would like to come up and say a word, it is up to you. If you do not want to, that is fine, and that is okay, honey. I did not want to pass you by without being able to say something. That testimony was great for a number of reasons, but the main thing I got out of it: Did you see how this church worked as a team? You noticed there was not one person's name that did the whole thing. You have got to see that. For him to get that testimony and for me just to move on to the next without you seeing that, we would miss something great.

First of all, all the McGinnis's and Mike Alanese back here, they were in my life years ago, back in the 80s. We had a lot of stuff for the last 20-some years, and they have been spread out all over the place. What are the chances that we are going down to a canoe trip, Steve and Nikki are driving down there, and they see a restaurant to go eat in, and bang, Mark is running it? Then a short time after, they go down again, and you and your wife went down, and bang, you connect again. Then he gets on the website, which goes back to you, go back to the website. Then I get

back in touch with him. Now all of you are in touch with him, going down on every other week or every week on a regular basis. It was not one person that was responsible; it was all of us together, allowing God to use us. Nobody taking the credit, nobody taking the glory, nobody bragging that "it was me that did this" or "me that did that." Everybody understanding that that is what Christianity is: it is a team concept. God felt good enough to pull it all together to use that the way He did to bring about the results. Then it just goes on from there.

I do not know what the future holds down there for them. If it does not pan out, they may move back up here. I do not care. We will send people down until Jesus comes back. That is our job. I will promise you this right now, and if I am bragging in this, I am bragging on you, not me. I do not know of another church in this city that would send two people down that far down for one family every Sunday. They would be a non-essential. They would be something that "we have got too much going on here." I am just telling you that I am not taking the credit for that; I am putting that on you because I do not have to go. I stay here. You are the ones that get up in the morning. You are the ones you have to rearrange your schedule. You are the one that has to get your kids and get it all ready to go. You are the ones that have to do that. That is where you are at with it. Once we get past this section, we are going to move into helping them with some biblical stuff and going through some of the stuff we are going to go through. It is an ongoing process. So thank you, Mark. I appreciate that and appreciate you for being here today. I just love you. You will find a balance; everybody does. I did the same thing when I got plugged into it. Man, I was spending 40 hours a week in it too. But it evens out in time, and you see where you have got to balance it all out. That is just part of how it goes. Praise the Lord.

Before we get to our next one, is there anybody who wants to give a short testimony? I will just open it up. Come on. It is hard for me to sit back there and not say something.

## VI. Continued Testimonies of Transformation

*Rose's Testimony:*

*It is amazing what has happened in my son's life and in my life over a year's time. I was standing with the Jehovah's Witnesses for five years, probably at least. I was in the Bible study every week of my life. I was raised Baptist, and I was a born-again Christian at the age of 13, and I knew what I was doing. I have always been on my knees praying, always. Then when I had my child, I prayed for him every day. He will have to tell his testimony someday. But he was a rebellious, smart, allied child, and he was very, very—I mean, he was nasty mean to me.*

*But besides the point, I was standing with the Jehovah's Witnesses, and Harry started coming to this church. He was led to this church. He would come over every Sunday, and he would want to eat, and we would fix dinner. He kept telling me, "Mother, you have got to go to church. You have got to try one time. I swear, Mother, you will be hooked." I said, "Oh, someday I will take the time out, and I will come. But right now, I am into this other church. I am going to Kingdom Hall. I am learning, and nobody is taking the time to teach me before. I have gone to Baptist churches all my life. I did not have anybody teaching me. Sunday school was Sunday school; we all learned the same thing, but we did not really learn, did not put it together."*

*So one Sunday, I told Harry, "Okay, I promise this one Sunday I will come." Sure enough, I had not heard preaching like this since tent revivals. Had not heard it. Never seen it. Did not put anything together. Just did not get it. I said, "How can this be? I have not heard this all my life. I have never heard anything like this in my life." So I got hooked, and I started coming here, and I did not know how I was going to tell my friends I could not have Bible study, but I knew that I could not have it anymore. So I told them one time, they came over, and I said, "This will be the last time." I said, "I cannot do it anymore. I have got other issues, and I have got to take care of them." Well, my mother was ill, and that was one of the issues that kind of got me sidetracked so I could come here and deal with the other. So after a while, they did not come around anymore. They came around for a while, but I did not have time, and they did not leave their stuff, and now they do not call, and they do not bother me anymore.*

*But the whole thing is this: I got disciplined. I never had anybody explain communion and all those lessons. I never had a one-on-one, and I never understood and never put anything together. I got through the discipleship program, and my son and I were just back and forth with it. We could not get enough of it. He was trying to tell me, and I was telling him, and we were maybe a lesson apart. He called, and when he first started calling, he would sit on the phone with me for hours until I told him I was tired. I mean, he could not stop preaching. I told him, "You are preaching at your mother." He said, "But I have got to tell you, Mom, this is so exciting, and I am learning so much." Then when I got into it, I was doing the same thing; I was calling him.*

*Harry and I had not been able to talk for a long time because of some issues in the family, and now we could talk about anything, everything, anytime. We are on the phone. He is checking on me; I am checking on him. But we had not been able to talk for years, and the respect is like a 99-degree turnaround. Just totally. He calls. He says, "Mother, how are you doing? Are you okay? Do I need to come over? Do you need anything?" He will not let me take the trash even to the corner on Sunday; he takes it to the corner. Our lives have changed forever, and neither one of us can get enough. We just cannot get enough of Jesus. We cannot get enough of the Bible studies. We cannot get enough of our Christian family, and now some family is family, and some of it is not anymore, because this is our family, and I love everybody. I love every one of you, and I just love you, and I thank you for the fellowship and the Christian fellowship and friends.*

And there again, you see the team concept. Harry comes, Jimmy disciples Harry. She gets disciplined. Rose and Nancy disciple her, and it is all about everybody pulling together. The next testimony we are going to have is Teresa. I have got to do something real fast. I might need this.

*Teresa's Testimony:*

*It was by an invitation from Jerry Tatum. She cannot be here today, but she is going to get it on the tape. She invited me to a Thursday night Bible study. Jerry said, "Teresa, you can come and ask any question you want to about the Bible." I said, "Well, I have got a question, so I am going to go." I came that Thursday night, and I even attended the Sunday service at the end of the week. I never went back to the church that I had been to for 25 years. I understood it to be a bad doctrine church. Old Pass was now my home, and God's truth was spoken here, and it was taught here.*

*My testimony begins on the afternoon of June 30th. My husband of almost nine years walked out, and he never returned. After two weeks of waiting for phone calls or some message from him, I filed for divorce. Soon after, he was served his divorce papers, and they filed for temporary maintenance. On the advice of my attorney, I started to search and found out what bills there were. I found out I had several aliases, and I was in about \$125,000 in debt, and that my home and my utilities had not been paid for. After that initial shock of these findings, I got busy. I had two garage sales. Tangeline, Jim, and Gabby were there. They could not believe that at the end of the day, I had sold so much. But the money was in my pocket, some \$600. I also sold my Dooney & Bourke purse collection on eBay, totaling over \$600. In keeping my promise to God, I tithed my 10% of everything that I sold. I had enough money now that I paid my utilities that were in arrears and even some for my attorney's fees. But I could not afford to pay the mortgages and the interest on the home loans, and they began to rise.*

*I had not worked in about three years, but in July, I was able to get part-time work in retail, and I worked some 20 hours or more a week. Then in August, I got a full-time job as a receptionist, and I worked both jobs about 60 hours a week for a short time. To the world, this sounds really dumb because you do not have enough money to live on, so why would you tithe? But each time I gave God His 10% first, and then I lived on the 90% that He blessed. Believe me, He blessed me. I never gave up on God. I hold His promises and His principles to be true. God was my only hope in this world. My Bible slept with me at night. I never wanted to be without His Word.*

*I was told that I would lose my home because I could not afford to make the first and second mortgage on it. I struggled with that idea, but soon I came to understand that God would take care of me wherever I was. I started to collect boxes at work to get ready to move, and I had many prospects from church family for me to move in with them.*

*Psalm 91:2*

*I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.*

*Psalm 91:3*

*Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence.*

*Psalm 91:4*

*He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler.*

*I held on to those words close to my heart. I kept them.*

*I sent Troy; he had turned to church with me, and he was saved there. He even started discipleship classes, but soon the world had taken him back to the old life that he was used to. I was hurt and I was frustrated, but I knew God had His plan, and that I would need to just wait on Him.*

*One night I walked into church for a Thursday night Bible study. I was greeted by Barb Christie, who said, "Teresa, I cannot wait to see what God is going to do with this!" It took me a bit; I was*

*a little bit confused. Others had said, "I will pray for you." Others called to console me and sent cards to let me know that they cared, but Barb was anxious to see what God was going to do.*

*Proverbs 3:5*

*Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.*

*Church family put gas in my vehicle so that I could attend the church functions. I talked with one of the young women in the church one night after she filled my tank with gas, and she asked about Troy. She asked about my other son, Ryan, and his family, and I told her that Ryan was lost, and he would not come to church. The young woman listened and assured me that if I needed anything to call her, and we exchanged phone numbers. I felt the love and generosity from my church family that night and to this day still.*

*I went to the Alexanders one evening to go look at the stars at Powell Gardens, and as I pulled into the drive, I was greeted by Brother Bob and Barb. Brother Bob wanted to tell me what had happened in his day at the gym. He said he was walking, doing his laps, when a man that he had never seen before approached him and asked him if he was a pastor, and Brother Bob replied that he was. The man then asked him, "What kind of people do you have in your church?" Brother Bob said, "Middle-class people." He handed Brother Bob something and said, "I am sure you could find someone who could use this money," and it was \$200. I am standing there. I replied, "Well, that was cool, man. Much better than what happened to me in my day. That is awesome, Brother Bob." Brother Bob said, "You are the one we chose." I could not believe it. I cried happy tears and thanked him and thanked Jesus for the gift.*

*On October 12th, there was an important meeting with both of the attorneys and the judge about filing for temporary maintenance, and it was a small victory. As the attorney told me, I was assigned a special master. A special master was an attorney with some 20 years' experience, and she was to expedite the ruling in my case for temporary maintenance. That was a hallelujah day, guys!*

*For my birthday, on October 21st, Jerry Tatum organized a party and a devotional that was led by Barb Alexander. Barb's message was from 2 Timothy 1:7.*

*2 Timothy 1:7*

*For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.*

*Those words were just so needed. I now knew that when the fear came, it was not from God, but the one that wants to cause me such pain and misery in my life because he cannot have my soul. I have power through Jesus Christ, and it dwells in me. I can love those that hurt me because He first, Jesus first, loved me. I can have a sound mind, making the decisions that I need to make. I have God's mind, the Bible, to help me. I just need to plug it in.*

*I received many phone calls of comfort. I even got a gift certificate in the mail for Petco to purchase dog food for my three dogs. God heard my cry, as in Psalm 61:1-2.*

*Psalm 61:1*

*Hear my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer.*

*Psalms 61:2*

*From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I.*

*Brother Bob assigned two wonderful ladies to work with me. We met for dinner one night, and my meal was paid for. They wanted to get to know me and my situations so they could better help me. We talked and cried for a long time and bonded for an eternity. I knew that they were going to help me through this tough time and to be there for me to talk and relate to. They asked me how I was going to get the monies needed to get an attorney to represent me in the financial end of my case, as I was going to need to file for Chapter 7 to get out of the deep debt. Then with assurance, they told me that God would answer my prayer for this need, and I was not to worry.*

*That very, and I mean very, next day, I went to work to find an envelope setting on the computer's keyboard with my name on it. Inside it was a check for \$2,000. The owner of the agency was waiting around the corner to see my reaction, and I hugged her and let her know that God had answered my prayers through her. I now had money to start the filing and even some extra. That night I called the ladies, and I shared what had happened and how God had heard my prayer and answered my prayer.*

*Now the meeting with the special master was to expedite a ruling, but the wheels of justice are very slow. October had passed, and so did November, but in December, a meeting was scheduled for Monday, December 3rd, and on Sunday, December 2nd, Brother Bob had asked those in attendance to pray for me about that special master's meeting, and you did. As I sat in my chair next to my prayer warrior friend, Tara Bradford pointed over to me. I thought I had something on my shirt, and she pointed again, "Look over your shoulder." So I looked back, and as I did, I saw my son Troy standing up in the back. Yep, God did it again. Troy came to church unexpectedly, and he heard a wonderful message that I would find out later had touched his heart.*

*After services that day, some of the church family went to dinner. Troy invited me to go along. He said he would pay, so I went. Jan Hill leaned over to me at dinner and said, "Look at this, Teresa. Isn't this neat?" I had to tell her I was thinking the same thing. Old and young, we were all there, just enjoying the food and fellowship. I had not laughed like that in a very long time, and I enjoyed every minute or hour that we were there. Right, Phil?*

*The next day was the meeting with the special master. There was a court reporter present, and the special master pointed out to all of us that it was very rare to have a court reporter present in that type of hearing. Actually, we had two; we had to send one home. Well, maybe it was rare for her, but it was not for my God. My attorney was ready and had all the facts down to prove my case. Although it was exhausting, some three hours later, we had 25 pieces that went into evidence, and they had two. It was over. As I drove back to work, I called Brother Bob and my friend Dawn. I called Dawn because she was very curious and wanted to know about the*

*outcome, so I had to let her know first. Brother Bob, I did call Dawn first. But I let them know that I felt God's presence, and it was now in His hands.*

*I was given a Christmas bonus that very same day I went back to work. It was \$100. A bonus, I thought? No, a gift from God. On my way home, I called Troy, and I told him about my day, and I wanted to thank him again because I had such a good time that day at lunch, the day before at lunch. Troy said, "Mom, I have something to tell you. I wanted to take you out to dinner and tell you, but now is as good a time as any." Okay, you guys, when my son told me that, that was not what I was expecting to hear. But I listened on. He said, "Mom, I felt as if Brother Bob's sermon was meant for me. How did he know to preach that?" I said, "Troy, God gave that message to Brother Bob weeks before. If for nobody else, it was for you to hear." And I do believe that. Troy said, "Mom, I want to come back and live with you and to help you out because you are struggling. But, Mom, here is the pièce de résistance: I also want to get right with God. I want to get strong and be disciplined. I can do that living with you because you go on Thursdays and Sundays, and I will too."*

*I could not stop these tears; they were flowing from my eyes, and with the thoughts of how good God is to me, I told Troy that this was from God. Once again, I thought this whole thing was about Troy moving in to help me. God said He was blessing me through Troy by getting right with Him.*

*That next evening, Troy and I went out to eat. We had Chinese. And we went to my grandson's basketball game. Oh, by the way, Troy bought the Chinese too. On the way there, Troy got a call from Ryan. He was my oldest son, and he was very upset. He was crying. His wife had just served him with divorce papers and an ex parte. He had to leave the apartment. Troy told him to go to his apartment and stay, that he would be home after the game, and they could talk. My heart was saddened by the news, but I knew that Troy could be of some comfort to Ryan. I spoke with Ryan later that night, letting him know that we were supportive of him and that he would be in our prayers, and that we were family, and we would take care of each other.*

*On Thursday night, I went in to take some crafts to the children's class. I was met by Barb and Phil and Olivia Christie. Phil said, "Teresa, your sons are here." I said, "Yeah, Troy said he was going to be here, awesome." And he goes, "No, Teresa, both of your sons are here." Well, guess what happens? The floodgates of tears start flowing again as I had to see it to believe it. Sure enough, there is Troy and Ryan. Praise God. I took Ryan around, introducing him to all my friends. The few times that I looked over during the study, I saw Ryan texting on his phone, something I do not know how to do, by the way. I thought, "Is he really listening?" In silence, I asked God to bless him for just being here.*

*To close with prayer at the end of the night, Brother Bob told us all to bow our heads and close our eyes. He gave the call out to those who wanted to be prayed for, if they did not know Jesus, that he would pray for them. Then he said, "Look at me, young man. Do you want to know tonight if you died, you would go to heaven?" No words were spoken. Just then, I heard someone hug Brother Bob. Then Danny was called, and the door was shut. Brother Bob said, "Troy, it is what you did coming to church, showing your brother." And then to me, "Teresa, it is the way you*

*are living your life with all that you are going through." Crying like a big old baby, I said, "No, it is God, and He deserves the glory." God had answered a prayer that I had been praying for a long, long time, and He chose that day to make it come true. My son Ryan was saved that night, and he is being disciplined by an old high school friend. Both of my boys are on the road to a beautiful relationship with Jesus, and my grandsons, they will know Jesus through their father. Ryan said that night that he wanted his sons to know God and not to wait until they were 30 years old like him. Again, I am reminded that this is not about me, but the salvation of my children and sharing an eternity with them.*

*On December 18th, the ruling from the special master came in, and I am to receive temporary maintenance, retroactive to October, and to be paid the 10th of each month. I am to get back the attorney's fees that I had already paid, and he is to pay the fee of the special master as well. I have not seen any of the monies yet thus far, but I hope to soon. Again, those wheels of justice move slowly. This was a big victory for me, guys. It was a big victory for sure.*

*Oh, and one more thing. I am going to blow you away on this one. On Friday of this last week, I called the financial institution, and my husband had paid the interest on the loan that was behind on the home loan. The acceleration and then foreclosure would have started yesterday. But now I can live in my home of 30 years with my boys. Once again, God has answered my prayer, and His blessings are still flowing.*

*I want to close and say thanks to Jesus for all the many ways that He has blessed me and my family, and to my sons for loving Jesus as I do. I am really proud of them. A good friend shared something with me in Second Chronicles. It is the story of Jehoshaphat. I want to share that verse. I held truth to me with you.*

*2 Chronicles 20:15*

*And he said, Hearken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat, Thus saith the LORD unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's.*

*I know that God is fighting the battle for me, and I have nothing to fear. I want to thank Brother Bob for God's truth and all of his messages to us, even if it hurts, and to keep them coming, if for no one else but me, because I need it, and for his leadership in my life. I want to thank Barbara Alexander for all that she has done for me and her love and patience and letting Brother Bob do what he does for all of us. Thank you, Barb. I want to thank Jerry Tatum, my dear friend of 29 years, for her giving and caring ways and for always being there and sharing this life for me and inviting me to Thursday night Bible study, and all the others that have touched my life in this church. You know who you are. I thank God for each and every one of you. Yes, Barb Christie, I stand in awe of what God is going to do next.*

*And there again, you see the team concept. Harry comes, Jimmy disciples Harry. She gets disciplined. Rose and Nancy disciple her, and it is all about everybody pulling together. The next testimony we are going to have is Teresa. I have got to do something real fast. I might need this.*

That was a much better sermon than I preached, Teresa. I will just say this: I have been around for a long time, seeing a lot of things. I do not think in all my life I have ever met a person who, given where you were at, given where you have come from, I have never met another person that trusted God through some of the deepest, darkest times I have ever seen in my life. There were times when I got off the phone with you, I just did not know what to say, did not know what to do. But you were a living testimony today. If you heard nothing else today, that is a living testimony, a living story. It does not matter what your circumstances are. It does not matter how overwhelming it looks. It just takes you being somebody who is willing to trust God in everything that you do. Sometimes when you have nowhere to go, nowhere to look, nothing to do, that is when God does the best for you. Praise the Lord for that.

## VII. Nikki's Testimony and Final Exhortation

I have one more we are going to have come here. Mark kind of represents the people that God has put in our lives, in his family, that we kind of minister to. Teresa is a lady that came into our church, and we worked through a lot of things with her. You heard her testimony. I wanted to pick one of our young people. The young people in our church are just incredible. I just love them to death. I just pile around with them all the time and just joy being with them. I love their freshness, the time we spend in the Word of God. So I asked Nikki Halbert to come and give her testimony this morning. Nikki, would you come on?

*Nikki Halbert's Testimony:*

*Well, Teresa, I thought I did not wear any mask here today. Today is a really important day for me. December 31st, 2006, which would be a year ago tomorrow, was my first genuine visit to Old Pass Baptist Church. I had been a few times because Liz, Kyle Powers' wife, had told me a little bit about this church, and she and I have been friends for a long time. She told me a little bit about it. She knew I was struggling in my life, and she had always invited me and wanted me to come. I had been to a few Thursday night Bible studies but never really took it seriously until a year ago last year.*

*I had a hard time putting this all together, and I have talked to Bob about some of the people in my family and trying to figure out what I was going to say to them about the Word of God and the truth and the things that it has brought to my life. He kept giving me the verse, Isaiah 55:11.*

*Isaiah 55:11*

*So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.*

*I thought about that and thought about it and thought about it, and I was like, "I think I am going to talk about this today." I thought about the last year because I have had the opportunity to think about what I have done over the last year. I think about four distinct times in my life that God talked to me through other people.*

*To kind of give you a little bit of background on me, I went to a Lutheran church in Columbia. That is where I grew up. I went to church there for about seven years, then went off to college. I*

*had no parents, had a new start, none of my friends from high school, and I could do whatever I wanted. I decided, "Well, I am going to forget God because I can do all this myself." I went to college, got my degree, did lots of partying, lots of drinking, started smoking in high school, just did a lot of things that were ungodly, as far as I am concerned.*

*The first time that God spoke to me, or to kind of catch you up to speed, I graduated and started my career as a respiratory therapist. I had a boyfriend that I moved in with, and we were together for three and a half years. At this point, I was not happy with him. I was not happy with my relationship with him. I had started a job at a bank and then got fired. I called my mom that day. I was sitting in the parking lot crying because I could not believe I got fired. I was like, "Oh my gosh, my life is over. I cannot afford my rent. I cannot afford to do anything. I am going to have—I do not know what I am going to do." I got on the phone with my mom, and I told her about it, and she says, "Maybe you should put God back in your life." I thought about that for a second, and I was like, "You know, this is not the first time I have heard this. I have heard Liz telling me about the Bible, and her and I have had numerous debates about it." I thought about that. I was like, "You know what, she is probably right. Because God has taken everything away from me to show me that I cannot make it without Him. I cannot." That was the first time that God spoke through somebody. My mom is unsaved, but He spoke through her to talk to me. I thought about Isaiah 55:11, and when you talk to people about God, remember, His Word will never return void.*

*I went home and I thought about it and thought about it, and I was like, "Okay, I am going to get my life straight and start going back to church." I made the hard decision that my boyfriend and I needed to split up. We both agreed on it. I am thinking, "I am going to go back to Columbia. I am going to get my life straight." So I called up Liz on the phone. We are talking, and she is talking about her day, and I tell her, "Guess what, Liz, I have decided I am going to go back home to Columbia. I am going to start going back to my old church. I am going to find a job in Jefferson City because I have a degree in political science." So I was like, "Okay, this will work out perfect. Save some money, live at home with Mom and Dad, and I will move out." I thought, "Well, Liz is going to back me up on this." Instead, she gets on the phone. She is like, "Are you sure that is what you want?" I am like, "Wait a second. I thought you would agree on this." I am sitting here thinking, "Well, yeah. Is not that what you want me to do? Go back to church and get my Bible and whatnot?" She told me, "Are you sure that is what you want to do?" I said, "Well," she goes, "I tell you what, you are not going to church. Why do not you just come to church on Sunday and listen to Bob preach and talk to people at my church and go out to lunch with us and whatnot?" I said, "Okay." That was December 31st, 2006, that I came in here the day before New Year's Eve. In that moment when she told me, "Are you sure that is what you want to do?" that is God speaking to me again, saying, "You know what, you cannot do this without Me." He does it in the weirdest ways. Liz may think that is insignificant, but to me, when I look back at it now, it was the words that I needed because if she had not said that to me, I would be back in Columbia, and I do not know what I would be doing with my life. So again, when you are speaking to somebody, remember God's words never return void.*

*The third time is the promise that Bob gave me. Liz took me over to Bob's house one time, and I had a thousand questions to ask because I asked a lot of questions. One of the things was, he told me, "If you put your roots down in a Bible-believing church and just focus on that, I promise you God will take care of the rest." At this point in my life, I had asked Liz and Kyle if I could move in with them because I did not have a place to live and still did not have a job. My boyfriend and I were splitting up. He was going back to Warrensburg, and I really did not know what was going to happen in my life. But I hid that promise in my heart, and God accomplished that for me.*

*The fourth time was a conversation that I had with Bob about my mom telling me that I had to go home, and I could not decide. But this time, God had given me all the tools that I needed, and I had to decide on my own. I took that and thought about it and thought about it. Bob had told me, "I do not recommend that. I do not recommend you going home. It is going to do you a whole bunch of damage. Just do not go home. But that is really up to you, Nikki, and you have got to decide what you want to do." God made me stand on my own ground and make that decision to trust in Him and what Bob had to say. I decided to do that, and oh my gosh, He rewarded me.*

*To this day, a year ago tomorrow, a year ago January 1st, I quit smoking. I have not had a cigarette since then. I have a job. I will have that job for a year. On February 8th, I have a place to live by myself with my cat. He is my roommate. My boyfriend that I was speaking to you about, he got saved, and we both serve the Lord together in this church, and I thank the world for him. He is not here today because he has got something else he has got to do. But we have a much brighter future now that we have been in this church. About November of last year, I was put on an antidepressant, and I am actually on my last month of that. I did not think that God could take care of things like that in my life, but He has. I no longer need that because I have got a friend inside of me, and His name is Jesus Christ. The list goes on and on. I could stand up here all day long and tell you great things God has done for me.*

*But I want to leave you with a verse that I have talked about and told people about, and that is Ephesians 2:8-9.*

*Ephesians 2:8*

*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:*

*Ephesians 2:9*

*Not of works, lest any man should boast.*

*I want to leave you with that because remembering that Jesus Christ died on the cross allows you to get to heaven and allows you to have the wonderful things that God has given me. I hide in my heart that it is a gift. It is something that you get, and you cannot take it away from you, no matter what you do in your life. I am not perfect, and I have got things that I have to take care of in my life, but I certainly know I thank the Lord every day for that gift because I do not know where I would be without it.*

*If there is any advice I can give you, I do not know where your hearts are. I know some of you may have things you need to work on. I do not know if you are right with God, but you know if you are right with God. If you are not right with God, do not wait until you have absolutely nothing in your life like I did. He had to strip everything away from me to show me that I cannot live without Him. You do not have to wait that long. You do not have to be that stubborn-headed. Believe me, it is a struggle every day, but it is the best struggle of my life. I just thank the Lord for it. I thank Pam and Angela, my two sisters in Christ—there are lots more than that, but they are the ones that disciplined me. I thank Bob for all the truth that he has given me over the last year and has provided me the things that my father has not been able to. I just thank all those people in this church that have just hugged me and loved me and appreciated me for everything that I am. I thank Liz and Kyle for giving me the opportunity to live with them and get right with God. I just hope that if you are not right with God, you make that something that you can do this year. If you need help, there are so many people in this church that would be willing to help you. Thank you.*

You do your part, God will always do His. That is really the issue. Here we are in New Year's. Make sure this next year becomes the year of the Bible in your life.

One last thing, Teresa said this about the guy at the fitness center that gave me that money. That man was an unsaved man. He is probably in his early 80s, late 70s, just had a stroke, comes up and just hobbles around the place. His name is Dennis. I recognized when he called me over that morning, I appreciated, and I had been praying for Teresa. It was the weirdest thing in the world; it is a true story. He called me over. I had seen him there before, but I had never really talked with him. We would joke, and he would say something, but we never really had a conversation. So he called me over, and he says, "Are you a preacher?" I said, "Yeah, I am a pastor." He said, "What kind of people do you have in your church?" I said, "Oh, they are just good common people that love the Lord." He says, "I like to help people. Do you have anybody in there that needs some help?" I said, "Yeah, I do." He pulled out a lot of hundred-dollar bills. It must have been that big around. Dennis is my new best friend, by the way. All right, Dennis.

I took the money from him, and I looked at him, and I said, "Dennis, I really appreciate this. I have a lady that this is going to go to. But I want to tell you something, Dennis. I know you had a stroke, and I know your health is not very good. Dennis, you know that giving this money is not going to help you with your salvation." I could not take the money knowing that he was lost without telling him that it was not going to do him any good when it came to God. I just could not do that. I witnessed to him right there. I told him, "Dennis, God died for you on the cross." He said, "Well, I get down and pray every day on my knees." I said, "You only have to get down and ask Him to save you one time, Dennis." I went through the whole thing. In fact, the next day I went back, I brought him one of those little books that had all the promises in it, that he could go through. Pray for Dennis. He did not get saved. I did not expect him to, but I wanted him to know that I appreciate what he did, but I want him to know he did not cut anything with God as far as eternity is concerned. It was not about what you give or how many people you help; it is about God's Son. I told him this, I said, "You know what? You made this woman's day by giving her a great gift." I said, "Put it in this context, Dennis. God gave you a great gift. His Son died on

the cross. Just as you gave this money to her, He wants to give His salvation to you." I said the two are similar, but they are not the same. He looked at me and he said, "I understand that." Pray for him. I do not think he has got long left. He is a very elderly gentleman. Great guy, but he needs to be saved. So that was great today. I just could not add anything to that. I just appreciate everything everybody said.

Do not let next year be like last year. I will help you whatever I can do. I will do whatever it takes. God will always do His part. I will always do my part. That is my job. You have to do your part. It starts many times with a good house cleaning. You need to take care of whatever needs to be taken care of, and I will help you any way I can.