

## Chapter 1

# THE GREATEST MIRACLE

When I heard the bones cracking, I knew this wasn't just another meeting.

Moments earlier, a crippled man had caught my eye. I was on the platform, and, as I preached, I noticed the man lying on the ground, horribly twisted and deformed. He was curled up into a tiny little ball.

This little man's arms were gnarled in toward his stomach. His legs were wrapped up like a pretzel and he looked as if he couldn't move at all. I have never, before that time or, since, seen anyone as horribly deformed as this man. But the reason he had caught my eye was that he indeed had started moving, despite all his deformities.

He was in the front of a crowd of several hundred crippled people and many blind, maimed and deaf people, all who were expecting God to perform a miracle on them.

Some were hideously crippled, bent over canes, and hunched up in wheelchairs, some were unable to even sit upright. Arms were gnarled, legs were shriveled. Eyes were whited out and unseeing. Ears were deformed and unhearing. Fingers were bent painfully over by arthritis that had built up calcium deposits on top of the knuckles, leaving them with huge humps where knuckles should have been.

Tiny children had braces on their legs, their sad parents sitting with eyes that seemed to be pleading for help.

This crowd of needy people was unlike anything I had ever experienced. I was only twenty-seven years old and I had seen many miracles, but the magnitude of so many hundreds of people needing a touch from God took me aback.

I was preaching in Manila, Philippines, the year was 1959, and here I was in front of a crowd of thirty-thousand people, preaching the Gospel, telling the people to expect God to move on their behalf.

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I had never expected so many people, though. I had no idea how I could possibly minister to so many.

“God,” I had said, “You are going to have to do something, because I’m just a Jew from New Jersey. I can’t help these people.”

The man who had been lying in front of the platform began to move even more. His legs began to unfurl from their previously twisted positions. His arms began straightening out. And his hideously deformed bones were cracking audibly as God began reconstructing them.

All around this precious man, people began experiencing miracles.

I saw mothers take the braces off their children’s legs. I didn’t just see one or two, I saw a whole crowd of mothers doing that, shouting to their children to “Walk, in Jesus’ Name!”

It was the most amazing thing I had ever seen.

These tiny children would fall as their little crippled legs gave out under the weight of their bodies. Their mothers, undeterred, would lift them up and shout again: “Walk in Jesus’ Name!”

The scene was repeated over and over...until one child no longer had to be picked up. His legs straightened themselves up right before our very eyes. He began walking, leaping and spinning as his mother’s eyes filled with tears, as she wept and worshipped God.

Then another child was healed. Then another. Then it seemed they all were getting healed.

Crutches began to fly all over the place.

Canes flew through the air as former cripples, who no longer needed them, cast them as far away as they could.

Crutches began to pile up at the front of the platform as people, who once could not walk without leaning on them carried their crutches up to the front and began dumping them.

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There was a tremendous shriek from the crowd of people. Then a scream.

A man with a shriveled leg looked down in amazement as bones grew, turning his useless leg into an identical match of his good leg.

A woman who was hunched over dropped her mouth open as, for the first time in decades, she stood up to her full height. The twisted bones of her back were healed and the hump that had pushed her over was gone.

The blind began to look around in wonderment, many seeing for the first time ever...

The place had gone into a complete frenzy.

I could barely believe my eyes.

Before my very eyes, the living God, the Creator of the entire universe, the King of all creation had reached through the heavens into the Philippines and had begun divine surgery on hundreds of people all at the same time.

God's sovereign hand was fixing the ills of so many people, I was overwhelmed. It was such a tremendous move of God, tears burst from my eyes involuntarily. I began weeping like a little child. I was awestruck to be in the Presence of such a holy God Who so easily could perform such incredible, tremendous miracles for so many people.

I didn't know what to do. What does the preacher do when God has stepped in personally and taken over a service so completely?

I did the only thing I thought I could do.

I ran.

I ran off the platform. There was a huge post behind the platform. I ran behind that post and hid.

It seemed I was there for some time when a very large Assembly of God missionary named Alford Cawston came over to me. He looked just as awestruck as I felt. No one in

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that place could possibly have not been impressed with the power of God that was in action there.

The missionary put his arm across my back.

“Brother Cerullo, you’d better get back to the rostrum or we are going to have a riot on our hands,” he said to me. I could see the concern in his face was real. He looked as if he could think of no other solution. “You are the only person who can hold this meeting in order.”

I didn’t want to go.

When the power of God is being manifested so sovereignly, there is a feeling in the air that everyone knows God is moving – no man in his right mind would want to undermine so powerful a move of God.

I almost told the missionary that, I wouldn’t go out, and that he would have to do without me. But just as I was about to protest, God reminded me of the story in the second chapter of Acts, where the power of God was moving similarly on the day of Pentecost.

The apostles had all just received the Holy Ghost, and they were all speaking with other tongues and causing a commotion among the people. That group of people also had a near-riot situation on their hands, but in Acts 2:14, “Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice...”

God had used Peter to direct the service, to be a vessel through which God ministered to all the people, not just the ones who had received a miracle...

Gathering all the courage I had in my young, inexperienced body, I stepped back on the platform, and the scene was no different. Canes were still flying. Crutches also were flying. Babies were falling, babies were walking. And I was still weeping in the Presence of the Lord.

“God, no one should ever see this much of Your glory and be allowed to live,” I said to God in the midst of being

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overwhelmed by His incredible power. “God, take me home. I want to die.”

I wasn’t kidding. I did not know what could happen that could compare to what I was witnessing. It was as if a river of power had washed over a beach full of people, crumpled and broken, and, as the tide hit them, they were all straightened and healed.

I truly did not see how I could go on living after seeing such an incredible move of God.

And I fully expected God to take me home right then.

But God did something I didn’t expect, and something I will never forget.

God said to me, “Son, you haven’t seen anything yet.”

The magnitude of that statement didn’t hit me just then.

For everything I had seen this night in Roxas Park in Manila, God was promising I would see more in the future. I thought I had seen all anyone could see and still live, but God said I would see more.

Throughout the fifty-three years of my ministry, God has indeed allowed me to see more.

I have had the privilege of ministering on every inhabited continent on the face of this earth, preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ, face-to-face, to literally uncountable millions of people.

By the grace of God, I have witnessed more miracles than I can count, with every conceivable kind of illness or deformity healed by the power of God. I have seen literally millions of people turn from the darkness of the devil that had enslaved them and turn to the light of Jesus Christ, receiving forgiveness for a lifetime of sins.

But when I was a little boy in a Jewish orphanage, I could have never imagined living such a life.

Instead, my goal as a rebellious young, hurtful boy was to cause trouble and rebel against every kind of authority figure.

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My very first memory is of tragedy, though I didn't know it was a tragedy at the time.

Most little boys are all the same; they cling to their mothers. They run to them when they've banged up their knees, or when they hear a scary sound. They ask their mothers to read a bedtime story to them as they drift off to sleep at night.

Many of us forget how central mothers are to the lives of tiny children. Their entire lives are wrapped around their mothers.

I was no different. My mother was very kind and loving, and as a little boy, I was very attached to her, I am told, because I have no memory of her.

The earliest thing I can remember is sitting in the back seat of a car, wondering where my mother was. I knew something was going on, but I didn't know exactly what it was.

I didn't know where my father was, either. All I knew was that something bad had happened, and I wanted my mother.

My brother and three sisters were in the car with me. They were all older than I. They all seemed to be upset about something. I didn't know where the car was taking us.

It was the 1930s. Cars were much larger than they are now. To a very small boy, however, the car seemed even larger – cavernous. I couldn't see out of the windows through the pouring rain. All I could see was my brother and sisters.

The car finally stopped at an orphanage. I don't remember very much about my experience there, because I was too young. I do remember learning that my mother had died, but I didn't understand what that meant. All I knew was that she was no longer around to bandage my scraped knees. She was no longer around to read bedtime stories to me.

When I was four, my brother, my sisters and I were all moved to a foster home in Teaneck, New Jersey, with an Orthodox Jewish family, because my mother, Bertha Rosenblatt, was a Jew.

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Although I was only four or five years old, I was already rebellious. I hated authority and did not like being told what to do.

When I entered school, I was already known as a problem child by the authorities.

I had run away a few times, and I withstood my teachers and elders when they would tell me to do something. There was a strong bitterness and resentment building up in me. Who stole my mother? Why did she have to die? Where was my father? I was told he was an alcoholic, but I didn't know what that meant.

God has a plan for everyone's life. He had a plan for my life, and even from an early age, the enemy was trying to divert my attentions; he was trying to get me to rebel not only against the authority figures in my life, but also against the plan God had for my life. I was a young boy, and I was all too happy to oblige.

When I was six, I was sent to the principal's office – as I had been many times before – for misbehaving.

The principal had bought a paddle just for me – a little six-year-old boy – because I misbehaved that badly.

The paddling was no different from any other time. She bent me over her lap and paddled me particularly hard.

But I was determined not to give her the satisfaction of knowing her spanking had hurt me. Afterward I looked at her defiantly and gave her the meanest scowl I could form on my little face.

Then, cursing under my breath, I turned and left her office.

I heard a voice, which said, "You don't have to take this. Why don't you run away?"

It seemed like a good idea.

My life was not fun anyway. I had to sleep in an attic bedroom with my four siblings, and we had to eat our meals in the cellar. I wasn't too keen on being in that situation any

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longer, and I was mad at the principal. So instead of going back to class, I walked out the door of the school and ran down the sidewalk into the street.

I knew that the railroad tracks that were nearby led to some swamps, and I thought I could hide for quite a while there.

I was a very unhappy little boy.

When the other boys would play games of kickball or football, they all smiled and laughed, tumbling and roughhousing. But I couldn't have fun like they did, because I was bitter and sullen.

I was constantly in trouble at school, and I felt like the foster home in which I lived was a prison.

I knew that if I were to be caught running away, the punishment would be severe. So I hurried to make my getaway as quickly and completely as I could. I was upset and angry, and I didn't want to be around any of the people I was around.

It was very cold, but I also didn't care about that. I made my way to the swamps and marshes, more worried about the prospect of getting caught than the dangers that were doubtlessly all around me, a little boy alone in Teaneck, New Jersey.

Not very long after I left the school, the principal called the police and informed them that I was missing.

The police found me, wandering around the marshes, and put me in the back of one of their cars.

In the back seat of the car, I was lonely and hungry. The policemen seemed to be very nice, but I knew they were taking me back to my prison, back to what I knew would be an awful punishment.

As we rounded the corner and I saw the house I lived in, my heart leapt into my throat. I knew what was coming.

The lady of the house thanked the police for finding me and returning me safely. No sooner had they left than her shoe came off and she began beating me with it. She hit me

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so hard and so many times that my little body gave out. I could no longer kneel upright; my legs gave way and I crumpled to the floor, in too much pain to move, or do anything else but sob silently.

But inside me, fury raged. There was a violence there that I cannot fully explain. After the beating, I was sent to our little attic room without supper. Still stinging and angry, curses and thoughts of revenge raced through my mind and filled me up where food wouldn't.

It seemed that the enemy was infesting my little six-year-old mind with the most angry and vindictive thoughts anyone could imagine. When we read today's newspapers and watch television newscasts, or hear of killings and shootings by young children, I understand the forces that are driving them.

Soon, our family was broken up.

Abraham, my brother, joined the army. My oldest sister, Frances, got married. My sister Pauline went to live with friends. Only Bernice, the youngest next to me, and I were left together, as we were transferred to a Gentile-run orphanage in Passaic, New Jersey.

We were slated to be at the orphanage only until the state could find an Orthodox Jewish orphanage to raise us.

Though we were at the Gentile orphanage only for a short time, I learned more bad habits there. I was eight years old, and I learned by watching the other boys at the orphanage. They would scour the streets, looking for discarded cigarette butts. The boys would then light the butts and smoke them.

I began going with the boys on their cigarette-gathering expeditions, and I joined them in smoking the cigarettes in the basement of the orphanage.

I was already a scrappy little boy. I would fight at the drop of a hat. I was very hard, very tough. If another boy looked at

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me funny, I would hit him until he dropped. And while he was on the floor, I would ask him, "why did you look at me like that?" It was the late thirties and early forties and Anti-Semitism was engulfing the country. Hitler was stirring up hatred of the Jews in Europe, and the sentiment had crossed the ocean and was very prevalent in the U.S. Other boys would call me derogatory names they had for "dirty Jews," and they gave me a very hard time about being Jewish. I learned very quickly that the only way to silence their racist banter was to shove a fist in their mouths, so that's how I conducted myself. I hit first and asked questions later.

A few months after Bernice and I arrived at the orphanage, the state was able to locate an Orthodox Jewish orphanage in Clifton, New Jersey, called the Daughters of Miriam.

The Daughters of Miriam was not only an orphanage, it was also a home for the aged. It was a very strict place.

Rabbi and Mrs. Gold were in charge, and when they met me, they already had the scoop.

"I understand you can be quite a problem," Mrs. Gold said, looking down at me as she led me down the hall. "To help you stop getting into so many fights, I've decided to put you in with the older boys; I don't think you'll give them quite the guff you're used to dishing out."

I wasn't scared. It didn't matter to me who it was, if someone bothered me, I was going to silence them any way I could.

The orphanage was a very tough place for a little boy. Our beds had to be made just right; if they weren't, they were ripped apart and we had to start over. I picked tomatoes and ran the potato-peeling machine, along with other duties like scrubbing floors, cleaning bathrooms and washing windows and dishes.

We attended public school, but we didn't participate in many of the activities because we were Jewish.

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One day, a boy at school called me a “kike,” a derogatory name for Jew. Immediately, I lashed out at him and began punching and kicking him.

Other boys joined in the fray and, though I gave as good as I got, I came away bloody.

Rabbi Gold was accustomed to seeing me come home bruised or with a busted lip. I frequently fought with other boys after school.

The rabbi told me to put a piece of ice on my nose and get ready to attend Torah class, which started in ten minutes.

As I was walking down the hall, another boy in the orphanage named Joey quipped, “Well, Morris, it looks like they got the best of you in school today.”

My vision went red. I jumped and began swinging my fists as hard as I could, knocking Joey to the floor. I followed him there and continued punching him. Finally, his head slammed into the floor and bounced back up, chipping my tooth. I felt nothing. I kept pummeling and pounding until Rabbi Gold physically picked me up and held my arms so I couldn’t swing them anymore.

My razor-thin temper had erupted again. I was ready at all times to erupt into violence; the enemy was doing his best to turn me into what he had designed for my life so he could keep me from what God had designed for my life.

The orphanage authorities had to restrain me for quite a while before I calmed down. A fury was boiling just below the surface at all times, and when it was released, it took a while to calm down.

Once I had settled down, I was rushed to the hospital so doctors could look at my mouth and my tooth.

That night, while I was lying in bed, I was just a little boy again. My tough facade was gone; I was just a little boy whose tooth was throbbing, whose mouth ached and throbbed with

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every heartbeat. I hated life in the orphanage. I hated going to school. I hated being a Jew. I hated everything.

I began to cry silently in the darkness of the orphanage dormitory. I would never have let any of the other boys see me cry, but in the darkness, I was alone and I didn't want to live any more.

I was only eight years old, but I had already decided that I wanted to die.

It was two o'clock in the morning. I quit crying and slipped out of bed.

I silently made my way to the bathroom. Once inside, I craned my neck around the corner to make sure I hadn't awakened any of the other boys. I looked all around the bathroom to make sure no one else was there.

I opened the second-story window and climbed out onto the ledge there. The concrete below beckoned to me, "Jump; it will all be over."

It seemed everyone had either deserted me or, the ones who had remained, hated me. My mother was dead. I had only seen my dad twice since I left what was home, and my brother and two sisters were gone. My classmates at school hated me because I was Jewish. I felt unloved and unwanted.

I squatted down on the ledge and tried to prepare myself to leap. I breathed in very deeply, then let the breath out. This would be just like diving off the diving board at a pool. I closed my eyes and tilted my little head upward, taking another deep breath and holding it inside. It seemed my heart stopped beating for just a moment.

I started to jump, but no sooner had my brain sent the signal to my legs to begin moving, I felt someone was in the bathroom behind me.

Startled, I whispered, "Who's that?"

No one answered. But I knew someone was there.

I slowly turned around, grabbing the ledge with my hands so I wouldn't lose my balance. As I turned, it became

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clear to me that the bathroom was empty. But I still sensed the presence of someone other than myself.

I turned around, and the sheer beauty of the night struck me as it never had before. The stars were twinkling; there seemed to be millions of them.

The air smelled fresher, more crisp, cleaner than it ever had before.

The moon glowed brilliantly, hung in the nighttime sky of Clifton, New Jersey, beaming down on me with what seemed to be a brand-new clarity. I had never seen such a beautiful sight.

I felt a warmth coarse over my entire body, from the tip of my head to the soles of my feet. I had never felt anything like it before. I didn't understand what was happening, but the anger was gone. My tooth and nose stopped hurting, but I didn't notice that until later.

I was overwhelmed by a Presence all around me. I knew I was experiencing something supernatural. I knew I was not alone. I climbed back in the window and made my way back into the dorm room. As I passed, I looked at the clock on the wall and saw it was 2:45a.m. It seemed impossible. The experience had seemed as if it had happened in a few seconds, but apparently it had taken three quarters of an hour!

Though God had supernaturally intervened to stop me from committing suicide, I was still rebellious, still disobedient, and still always looking for a way to escape from the orphanage.

By the time I was thirteen, I was ready to get my Bar Mitzvah. Bar Mitzvah means "son of the commandment," and it denotes that the recipient is an adult, according to Jewish tradition.

When a Jewish boy attains Bar Mitzvah, he is legally obligated to keep the commandments. His vows are considered valid. He can perform acts having legal implications, such as buying and selling property.

The calling up to the reading of the Torah is a symbol of a boy's attaining maturity. He is called up on the first

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occasion that the Torah is read following his 13th birthday. To a Jewish boy, it's a very big deal.

The boy is required to put on tefillin (which the English Bible translates as "phylacteries") for the morning prayer. The tefillin are two black leather boxes containing scriptural passages that are bound by leather strips on the left arm and on the head.

The boy is required to deliver a *derashah* "talmudic discourse", which he has been well-coached to give in Hebrew, though he may not understand what he is saying.

Since children are not allowed to carry the Torah, a boy is recognized as having reached maturity when he is allowed to finally carry the Torah at his Bar Mitzvah.

All the boys in the orphanage looked forward to their Bar Mitzvahs, and I was no different. It was a very big accomplishment, and a very exciting time.

I didn't understand the spiritual significance of Bar Mitzvah, only of the historical tradition that I would be considered an adult – at least in religious matters – by everyone in the orphanage and the synagogue, which was a part of the orphanage.

When I was fourteen, I and another boy decided to sneak out of the orphanage one night.

The orphanage had a crude alarm system that would sound if the door was opened, but I had been in the orphanage for years and I knew I could get out without alerting anyone.

I beckoned the other boy to follow me, and I stooped down to the baseboard, removing the wood, exposing two wires. I knew if I disconnected the wires, the alarm system would be disabled, allowing us to exit with impunity.

We quickly rushed out of the building, down the fire escape. We were free (if only for a few hours), and we could do whatever we wanted without any of the orphanage's strict rules or regulations.

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By the time the sun started to peek over the horizon, we realized we had to quickly sneak back home to the orphanage. We slipped into the front door and ran to the dormitory, slipping back into our beds, ready to pretend that we had just enjoyed a good night's sleep.

That very same day, the orphanage hired a new nurse, Mrs. Ethel Kerr. Since the Daughters of Miriam was also a facility for the elderly, most of Mrs. Kerr's time would be taken up with helping aged people live their lives.

Mrs. Kerr was a Gentile, and a Christian, no less, who somehow had gotten a job at a Jewish Orthodox orphanage.

Most of my experiences with Gentiles had been painful. They had called me names and abused me, and I really had no interest in spending time with anyone who was not Jewish.

My only Gentile friend was a boy whose father owned one of the largest trucking companies in New Jersey, Odstyk Motors. We hung out together at school, but he had never tried to tell me about Christ, so I didn't think about the fact that he called himself a Christian.

The first time that Mrs. Kerr, this new Gentile nurse, spoke to me, she called me aside.

"I have something special for you, Morris," she said to me, holding out a candy bar.

What kind of game was this?

I immediately became angry. I grabbed the candy bar and threw it on the floor as hard as I could, shouting, "I don't want any of your stupid candy! Just leave me alone!"

I stomped away.

What did she think she was doing? I was unaccustomed to anyone being kind to me, and I was extremely suspicious of Mrs. Kerr's unsolicited offer of a candy bar to me, a boy she didn't know. I had even cursed at her, but she seemed unflapped.

Every time I saw Mrs. Kerr, she was smiling. She always said the same thing, in the same cheerful voice: "Hello, Morris."

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It seemed she had forgotten about the candy bar episode altogether. She was never once unkind to me.

My initial fury at her offer had turned to curiosity. What was making this woman so kind to a boy who obviously did not want to give her the time of day?

I made up my mind that I was going to find out what this woman was thinking and why she was being so nice to me. I was very suspicious. In the past, everyone who had been kind to me had some sort of secret agenda or ulterior motive, something they wanted from me. What was her angle? I was going to find out.

Late one night, after I had assured myself that no one would do a surprise room inspection and catch me, I sneaked out of my room and down the fire escape. I loitered around the back court a while to make sure I had not been detected while making my exit. Once I was sure the coast was clear, I crept over to the quarters where the hired help were housed.

I walked up and tried to open the door to that wing of the building, but to my chagrin, it was locked.

I muttered a quiet curse and began to think of a way to get to Mrs. Kerr's room. I was determined to find out tonight exactly what she had up her sleeve.

As I was trying to think of a solution to my problem, I noticed that the wall under Mrs. Kerr's window looked as if it wouldn't be too hard to climb.

I ran over to the wall, and, placing my fingers gingerly in its' crevices, I pulled on the wall to see if I could climb up. It worked. I was able to slowly work my way up the wall, sliding my fingers into the crevices and my feet into crevices below, inching my way toward Mrs. Kerr's window.

When I got to her window sill, I grabbed hold of it with one hand, and with the other, I knocked on her window.

Nothing.

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Where could she be? It was too late for her to be out; surely she was there. Maybe she just hadn't heard my knock.

I knocked again.

Still nothing.

I knocked again.

Still nothing. I was getting frustrated. Surely my knocking had awakened her. Why wasn't she coming to the window?

Little did I know that Mrs. Kerr was inside her room, panicking. She didn't know what to make of the knocks on her window so high off the ground.

On my fifth knock, Mrs. Kerr gathered her courage and peeked out the window at me. Relief washed over her face when she saw my little head popping up over the window sill.

She threw the window wide open and grabbed my hand, helping me climb into her room.

"What are you doing here?" she asked. "What brings you out here at this time of night?"

I hadn't expected to have to answer that question. I had expected to be the one asking questions.

"Because," I stammered. "Because I want to know what you are up to. Why are you bugging me?"

I was unprepared for her answer. I had half-expected to hear her list of demands. After all, no one would be so nice without wanting something.

But her answer caught me completely off guard.

"God sent me here for you."

WHAT?

I couldn't believe my ears. I had been to Hebrew school nearly every day since coming to the Daughters of Miriam orphanage, and I had never heard such a thing.

God had spoken to Abraham, Moses and the patriarchs, but Rabbi Gold had never claimed to have heard from God. Yet, here was this Gentile claiming to have heard from God,

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and not only to have heard from God, but to have been “sent” for me.

Incredulous, I asked, “What do you mean you were sent here for me?”

She opened up her Bible and read from Isaiah:

*“Take counsel, execute judgment; make thy shadow as the night in the midst of the noonday; hide the outcasts; betray not him that wandereth. Let mine outcasts dwell with thee...” (Isaiah 16:3-4)*

“God has sent me to tell you about the Messiah,” she continued.

My mind began to race. Why had I come here? It seemed this woman was saying things I just couldn’t believe. How could a Gentile expect to tell me, a Jew, about the Jewish Messiah?

I knew all about the Messiah, I thought. In Hebrew school, we had learned all about it. We were waiting for the Messiah to come and be the King of Israel. What could she possibly know about the Messiah that I had not already learned from the rabbis?

“You’ve got to be kidding,” I snapped at her. “What can you tell me about the Messiah?”

She began to explain that the Messiah had come already.

“Stop,” I said. “We’re still waiting for the Messiah. Why are you saying He already came?”

“Because He has,” she explained patiently, that now-familiar smile still on her face. She began to explain to me that the Messiah had come to Israel nearly 2,000 years ago, and that He had died for my sins.

“This is too much,” I said. “I’m going back to my room.”

Abruptly, I climbed back out of the window and down the wall.

My mind was racing. This Gentile nurse obviously didn’t know what she was talking about I thought in my young

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mind. But she seemed so sure, so peaceful and so kind. I couldn't stop thinking about what she had said about God sending her to tell me about the Messiah.

I stayed awake for many hours, lying in bed, going over the conversation I had just had with this peculiar woman.

The next night, I couldn't contain my curiosity any longer. I climbed back out of my window, sneaked down the fire escape and climbed the wall to Mrs. Kerr's room again.

We continued that pattern for many nights. I would come to Mrs. Kerr's room, and we would debate and discuss the Old Testament heroes of faith: Abraham, Moses, Isaac, Jacob, David, Samuel, Gideon and others.

I questioned Mrs. Kerr on every point she made.

Already, my ambitions had turned toward the future. I wanted to be a lawyer, and I was already honing my skills at debating. Mrs. Kerr would make a statement, and I would challenge her on it.

But over time, I began to listen more. I enjoyed being in Mrs. Kerr's room. It was the most peaceful place I had ever been in.

Slowly, though I didn't realize that my heart was changing. I was spending so much time learning in Mrs. Kerr's room that I didn't even think about running away any more, or about stealing.

One night, Mrs. Kerr handed me a small, folded piece of paper. On the outside was a simple title: "Questions."

The tract was written by a Christian lawyer named James Bennett, which immediately piqued my interest.

I read the tract once, and then I read it again and again.

The tract's title was prophetic: all sorts of questions began popping into my mind.

The next night, I poured out all my questions to poor Mrs. Kerr. I had what seemed to be an unending stream of questions, and with each answer, more questions came to mind!

## SON, BUILD ME AN ARMY

Mrs. Kerr finally put her foot down. "Morris, it is too dangerous for you to be coming to my room all the time. Eventually someone is going to see you."

She took a little black book from her pocket and handed it to me.

"This is a gift for you," she said. "You don't have to take it if you don't want to. It's a New Testament. Do you want to read it for yourself?"

Did I!

Finally, we were getting somewhere. I couldn't wait to get the book back to my room and begin reading it, looking for the answers to my questions.

As I was about to leave, Mrs. Kerr stopped me.

"You'll need this," she said, holding out a tiny little flashlight. "You'll need to be very careful reading that New Testament. You'll have to read it at night when everyone else is sleeping or in some secret place."

As soon as I got back to my bed, I pulled the covers over my head and flicked on the tiny little flashlight.

This little New Testament was unlike anything I had ever read. Its pages were whisper-thin, and the ink smelled cheap. I eagerly read the first book, Matthew. Before I knew it, I was done with Matthew, so I began reading Mark. I finished Mark, but I was still hungry so I read Luke. I was not yet sated so I read on through to John.

What an incredible person this Jesus was!

His demeanor was loving and caring, but when the rabbis of His day tried to trick Him and trip Him up in His words, He always knew just how to answer them!

And I was fascinated by His teachings. How could a man be born again? His words spoke directly to my soul.

The New Testament revealed a man much different than I had imagined the Messiah would be. Jesus was misunderstood, beaten, laughed at, scourged, ridiculed,

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persecuted, mocked and reviled. Yet He had a zeal for God that was unmatched by any of the Old Testament prophets I had spent years learning about in Hebrew school.

Jesus had come to earth and had taken upon Himself the life of a lowly carpenter. He taught that we were to love our neighbors, to bless people who cursed us.

When I read about Jesus' sufferings on the cross, how He endured the bitter words and the beatings of those who reviled Him, I remembered my own life, how instead of "turning the other cheek," as Jesus advised, I had been the first to strike, to lash out at those who had hurled hateful words at me.

Jesus, however, had only kindness for those who mistreated Him. He had only love for those who hated Him.

I wanted to be like Him. I wanted to be strong enough to love those who hated me. I wanted to be strong, like Jesus, who feared no man, but feared God alone. I wanted to be compassionate like Him and to be wise like Him.

I eagerly and ravenously read and read. I couldn't get enough. But after I had read the four Gospels, I could no longer keep my eyes open.

Ever mindful that being caught with a New Testament would mean a more severe punishment than I cared to think about, I carefully pulled up the mattress of my bed and hid the New Testament and the pen light between the springs and the mattress.

When I woke up in the morning, I was careful to make my bed discreetly, working to avoid exposing the treasure I had hidden under my mattress.

I went about my chores, picking tomatoes, cleaning and running the potato peeler, but my mind wasn't in my work.

I was in awe, thinking about Jesus.

He had done more miracles than Elisha, and His words were filled with such wisdom, I could hardly contain my hunger to know more about Him.

## SON, BUILD ME AN ARMY

Time seemed to slow to a crawl.

I eagerly awaited bedtime.

When bedtime came, I listened carefully for signs that everyone had fallen asleep. It was a skill I had perfected during my many jaunts of escape and crime.

I listened to hear the deepening sighs of bodies that had fallen asleep.

It seemed to take forever.

Finally, everyone, but me, was asleep.

I pulled the covers over my head so fast, I almost pulled them completely off the bed.

I got out my little flashlight and the New Testament and began reading where I had left off.

I began reading about people who had lived my new dream to be like Jesus. Here were Jews, just like me, who had been laughed at because they were born in Galilee, just as I had been laughed at because I was born a Jew. They had been beaten, but just like Jesus, they were kind to those who beat them.

I read about New Testament heroes like Peter, John, Paul and Barnabas. I read how Paul and Silas worshiped God and the prison doors flew open.

Again, longing was sparked in my heart. I was in my own little prison. I knew how they felt.

Up to this point, Mrs. Kerr had been attending a church that was not very keen on loud displays of worship or operating in the gifts of the Spirit.

One day, Mrs. Kerr went to an Assembly of God church in Patterson, New Jersey. After attending the service, Mrs. Kerr came back to the orphanage very excited, and immediately told me about how the people praised the Lord aloud in the service, and how they worshiped God with such feeling!

She handed me a magazine she apparently had gotten at the service.

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The magazine was called the *Pentecostal Evangel*. I knew what Pentecost was; it was a feast that took place fifty days after Passover. And I also knew from reading the New Testament that during the Feast of Pentecost, the apostles had started their ministry in Jerusalem.

I was eager to read anything I could about Jesus, so I gladly took the magazine from Mrs. Kerr and began reading it as soon as I got to my room.

Once I read the magazine, however, I discovered that it was not what I had expected. I was expecting the magazine to tell me about what Mrs. Kerr had just described to me; I wanted to read about worshiping God aloud and about the feelings she was describing. Instead, what I read was about missions reports and other things that I was not interested in at the time.

I didn't think about hiding the magazine at all. Instead, I stuck it in the back pocket of my robe and hung the robe up on my locker.

The very next morning, the orphanage decided to do a locker inspection. I didn't think anything about it. My locker was nice and neat, my shoes lined up just so, my clothes neatly arranged and my school books stacked just right. I had no worries until I heard the horrified gasp of the nurse who was inspecting my locker.

The nurse grabbed the magazine and ran, full-speed, down the corridor, yelling, "Look at this! Look at this! A *Pentecostal Evangel*!"

In a matter of a few minutes Mrs. Kerr had been called into the rabbi's office. The rabbi immediately knew Mrs. Kerr was responsible for bringing the *Pentecostal Evangel* into the orphanage.

Rabbi Gold fired Mrs. Kerr, and then immediately called me into his office. "Morris! Morris! Come into my office this second. I want to talk to you!"

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I hadn't even completely closed the door when Rabbi Gold thrust the magazine in my face and shouted, "What is this?"

Was this a trick question? I didn't know what he wanted to hear. I began to think of how I could explain what the magazine was, when my thoughts were interrupted by the rabbi speaking again.

"Morris, this is absolute trash," he told me. "I don't know for sure what Mrs. Kerr has been telling you, but I do know it is all wrong. I don't ever want you to see that woman or talk to her again; is that understood?"

My heart sank.

I had never had a person to whom I could talk. I had never been able to really discuss things with anyone. Now he was telling me to no longer talk to Mrs. Kerr.

I began to cry. That in itself was a tremendous change for me. Whenever I had been confronted about things in the past, or when I had been scolded, my first reaction was to rebel, to lash out, or to simply ignore whoever it was scolding me.

But my heart had changed, and I was upset. I didn't know, but Mrs. Kerr was out in the corridor, praying, "Oh my God, what is going to happen?"

Her prayers must have helped, because when I spoke to answer the rabbi, it was with confidence.

"Listen, Rabbi Gold," I said. "I don't know much about what I read in that magazine. I don't even understand it. Even what Mrs. Kerr has been telling me is not completely clear. It's so different from anything I have ever heard, but I know it's real. It's real."

I began sobbing.

"It's real, and you can't take it away from me!"

It was to become a quote I would repeat many times, both to the rabbis who tried to convince me to give up my

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belief in Jesus, and to my friends in the orphanage who asked me what was going on.

I became accustomed to punishment again, as I began receiving punishment, not for the crimes I formerly had committed, but for my unwillingness to waver from my newfound belief in Jeshua, the Messiah.

Finally, one day when I was in the basement receiving punishment, I stood up and said, "I have not fought back all this time, but if you lay your hands on me once more, I am going up to that front door and I am going to walk out and you are not going to stop me."

The rabbi laughed at me.

He knew that I didn't have any money, extra clothes. or a place to sleep.

I turned and walked away from the rabbi. I didn't look left or right. I focused only on the front doors to the orphanage. I slowly walked toward the doors. I didn't run, I didn't speed up my pace at all. I fully expected Rabbi Gold to grab me from behind and stop me from leaving, but he didn't.

When I got to the doors, I pushed them open and walked outside.

Freezing sleet and snow pelted me in the face on this cold, snowy, mid-December night.

But I couldn't turn back now.

I walked out into the midst of what must have been a blizzard.

I had nowhere to go. I was completely alone.

After Mrs. Kerr had been fired from the orphanage, she would meet me in the school yard so that we could continue our discussions about Jesus. She had given me the phone number of her new job as a registered nurse.

I decided I would call Mrs. Kerr. I walked to the house of my Gentile friend from school. After I knocked, my friend's father opened the door and looked quite surprised to see me standing outside.

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“Sir,” I asked, “can I use your telephone?”

He agreed and I went inside. I then used his phone to call Mrs. Kerr. Miraculously, she was home and answered the phone. I told her what had happened, and we agreed that I would meet her at the Montauk Theatre in Passic, which was four miles away.

I thanked my friend’s father and went back into the freezing cold.

Suddenly I remembered, I had no idea how I was going to get to the theatre. I had no money...

I looked up into the forbidding sky, and fear began to rack my body. I had no idea where to go, or how to get to the theatre.

Finally, I thought, “I’ll head down to Main Street where there’s a lot going on. Maybe I’ll know what to do when I get there.”

I was terrified. It was snowing and sleeting, and I was wandering along a very busy street. At one point, an angry driver had honked at me and shouted, “Watch where you’re going, kid!”

I was in desperation. I was not even fifteen years old, and yet I was on my own with no friends, no food, no house to sleep in and I was very cold.

Right there on that street corner, I cried out to God: “Dear God, if there be such a person as Jesus up there in the heavens, please let Him be with me now!”

Almost immediately, a burst of warm air surrounded me. I did not understand what was happening, but I knew one thing: God had answered my prayer.

I began to weep again. “Thank you, God,” I said. “Thank you so much.”

I felt a nudge on my right side, just as if someone had walked up to me and elbowed me. I looked, but nobody was there.

Then I felt another nudge, this one on my left side. It was as if God stood right beside me on both sides, protecting me

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from the elements and the loneliness that had threatened to send me into despair.

My countenance was immediately changed. I instantly forgot about the fear and trepidation I had felt up to that point. I began to sing.

I also began to walk while I sang, for two-and-a-half miles, with God's presence surrounding me.

I can't explain the joy I felt. I can't explain the peace I felt.

All I knew was that I was not alone. God was with me, just as He had been with me six years earlier when I had thought about jumping from the orphanage ledge. I knew that everything would be all right, because God was there.

I was in complete joy. I paid absolutely no attention to where I was going. I had no regard for streets or the cars that were zipping by perilously close to where I was.

My right hand opened, and the Presence of God left my right hand. My left hand opened, and the Presence of God exited my left hand.

Suddenly, just as quickly as it had appeared, the warming Presence of God had disappeared. I closed my eyes and prayed. "Oh, God, please don't leave me now."

Before I could despair, however, I opened my eyes and discovered that I was standing in front of the Montauk Theatre, and there, less than two feet away, under an umbrella beneath the theater's lights, was Mrs. Kerr, looking more shocked than I had ever seen her.

We both burst into joyful tears!

Mrs. Kerr had been waiting at the theater for a long time, not knowing how or when I would get there.

Little did she know God Himself was guiding me!

Her next question was very welcome: "Are you hungry?"

I was hungry, but I was also still in amazement of the supernatural manifestation we had just witnessed. I could hardly believe what God had just done, protecting and

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directing me to just the spot where Mrs. Kerr had been patiently waiting for me.

But as God would tell me in the Philippines more than thirteen years later that, if I thought He had worked His most impressive miracles by getting me this far, I hadn't seen anything yet.