

“In *Testimonies of Grace*, Dr. Chris Brown retells powerful stories that are extraordinarily painful, yet full of God’s grace. Heartbreaking and authentic, these deeply personal testimonies of abortion, prison sentences, and abuse, will tug at your soul and pose the question, ‘Is the church doing everything we can to extend grace to the most broken and downtrodden?’ Dr. Brown’s Biblical wisdom brings forth validation to pain and the reminder of God’s unconditional love, to release you from a life of shame and into a life of freedom. Readers will identify with what Jesus calls ‘the least of these’ and will cheer with the power of God’s redeeming love. Anyone who has ever felt ‘less than’ needs to read this book!”

**Renee Nickell**, Bestselling Author of *Always My Hero: The Road to Hope & Healing Following My Brother’s Death in Afghanistan*

“Such a great book. I loved Chris’ first book and really looked forward to reading his new one. I was not disappointed. As a Christian and knowing my own struggle in life, it’s always uplifting and helpful to hear/read the struggle that others have overcome in their own lives. I think a lot of times the word Christian gets a bad rap. It does not mean we are perfect, or think that we are. It’s the opposite, we know that we are broken and need help to make it through life on a daily basis. If you want to know what God’s grace and mercy looks like, read *Testimonies of Grace*.”

**Brandi Atchison**, Owner of Shades of Pemberley Bookstore and Book Reviewer for Land + Lake Magazine

“Both hands in the air! *Testimonies of Grace* honors the bloody mud at the foot of the cross. Bravely told, these raw testimonies debunk the faceless, artificial sheen of modern Christianity as a world religion and rightly return focus to the face and eyes, the wild, radical love of Jesus the Christ... hope and full redemption available to ANYONE who should call upon His Name.”

**Jeremy Collins**, President and Founder of Three Circles Foundation

“*Testimonies of Grace* is full of incredible personal stories that demonstrate God’s deep love for us and His pursuit of us even while we are not pursuing Him. Every story is filled with such honesty of how our sins draw us away from God but how we are never drawn out of reach of His forgiveness. Each chapter offers resources to extend that help and hope found in Jesus for whatever struggles you may be facing.”

**Cathryn Buse**, Christian apologist and founder of Defend the Faith Ministry

“*Testimonies of Grace* showcases Chris Brown’s ability to capture a person’s life story in such a way that Jesus gets the Glory He deserves. Readers will identify, in some part, with one or more of the participants. An added bonus is the list of scripture and book references at the end of each testimony to help the reader dig deeper into finding the help and encouragement they need.”

**Peggy Weidert**, Owner of The Mustard Seed Christian Bookstore

“People never change’ ... at least that’s what we’ve been told. People may not change, but the power of the Holy Spirit transforms lives when we allow him to. Through compelling stories, *Testimonies of Grace* gives the reader access to the inside world of broken lives put back together by Jesus. *Testimonies of Grace* is an inspiring account of eight remarkable journeys, each one starting off in unique and different circumstances, but all leading to a restored relationship with God. Finally, reading *Testimonies of Grace* was also a stirring and encouraging reminder that God is still at work in my life as well!”

**Hal Ward**, Founder of Vino Nuevo Ministry

“*Testimonies of Grace* reminds us to never give up on anyone. With God, there is always hope. It is a reminder of the Good Shepherd who searches for and brings the lost sheep home. As Paul says, ‘I am the worst of them.’ We need to all remember that we are all the worst of them and not judge others. We have not walked in their shoes. Dr. Chris Brown very aptly weaves these stories of redemption with threads of God's grace, hope and salvation. These stories show the power of prayer and how we all are given opportunities to plant seeds, but only God can change hearts. These stories motivate us to strive to do a better job of listening to God's voice when He prompts us to help those who society says are beyond help because with God all things are possible! No one is beyond hope!”

**Mindy van Dyke**, Owner of Stepping Stones Christian Bookstores

“With brutal honesty and intense vulnerability, *Testimonies of Grace* is a beacon of hope for the lost, and a reminder that there is no soul too far gone that the Lord cannot redeem. A must-read for a healthy dose of empathy and insight into the mysterious workings of God as the lost reach rock bottom and He meets them where they are. Not only is it a message of how lives were changed, but how God - through different people and situations - was at work in their hearts long before their eyes were opened to their ultimate need for Him.”

**Becca Weidel**, Christian Book Reviewer at The Becca Files

“In *Testimonies of Grace*, you will find eight wonderful testimonies revealing the love of God. The testimonies will inspire you to write your own life-changing story. Testimonies are evidence of the miracle-working power of God which changes lives. Corrie Ten Boom often recalled her sister's words, ‘There is no pit so deep that God's love is not deeper still.’ You will find yourself thanking God out loud for His loving kindness and mercy. Each testimony reveals a different aspect of God's unfolding and eternal love for us.”

**Ivan Tait**, Founder and CEO of What Matters Ministries and Missions

TESTIMONIES  
*of* GRACE

DR. CHRIS BROWN

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## TESTIMONIES OF GRACE

### Preface

We pass by people every day without knowing what they're going through or what their stories are. We see them at work. We share a pew with them at church. We see them at the grocery store or the neighborhood park. Behind each smiling face is a life story. What would you discover if you knew those stories? How would you interact with them if you knew what they have endured? How would your own life be impacted if you saw more than a face?

*Testimonies of Grace* is here to tell eight of those stories. They are Ashleigh Grace, Whit, Tiffany, Barry, Lauren, Ken, Sadie, and Mark; four men and four women, some young and some not so young, some raised in the church, some not, some single and some married (Barry and Lauren are married to each other). These are eight people who you might not give a second look if you passed them on the street, yet they each have incredible stories of God's amazing grace in their lives. Here, you will find heartbreak and pain, but also the encouragement and hope that comes with faith in Jesus Christ. If you're not so sure about Jesus, just read on and take in these real accounts of encounters with Him.

Through interviews and some of their own writing, each story is told from the point of view of the individual.



## PREFACE

These are true stories and real events. In some cases, names and details have been changed to protect the innocent (and the guilty). These eight stories illustrate the ways in which God moves and works in individual lives. Together, they show His grace in every situation. This book will encourage the saints, challenge the religious, and give the skeptics something to ponder. All are welcome here.

### More to Think About

Following each story is a section called “More to Think About.” This section will provide concrete steps and resources that can help if you or someone you know is currently in a situation similar to the one you’ve just read about. In each section, you will find practical ways to apply what you’ve just read in a testimony. Each section will include scripture to meditate on and the opening of a prayer you can make your own. At the end of the book is a comprehensive list of the books, resources, and references mentioned in each chapter. The story is just the beginning – what you do with it is what counts.

## 63 Years – Ken’s Story

In the fall of 2006, at the age of 68, I was volunteering with Kairos Prison Ministry for the first time. We were doing a weekend program inside Limestone Correctional Facility in North Alabama, and, that Saturday night, along with a group of 42 inmates, I was listening to the final talk in a series about forgiveness. The speaker told all of us, team members and inmates, to take out a clean sheet of paper and write down the names of anyone we needed to forgive. I thought and thought, but I couldn’t for the life of me call to mind someone I needed to forgive. At the end of the talk, we are told to pray for the Holy Spirit to bring to mind the name of anyone for whom we harbor ill will or hold in unforgiveness. As soon as I started that prayer, the Holy Spirit spoke in a still, small voice and said, “What about Henry?” I was stunned! I heard it again, and, in this time of reverent prayer, I replied to the Lord and said, “You don’t mean that bastard that murdered my mother, do you?”



My great-great-grandparents on my father’s side emigrated from Germany to eastern Pennsylvania about 1850. Shortly thereafter, they crossed the Delaware River to the Garden State, New Jersey. To my knowledge, the next

## 63 YEARS – KEN'S STORY

three generations of children were all truck farmers, raising fruit and vegetables on small farms as opposed to raising grain, cotton, soybeans, etc., on large farms. Truck farming at that time was heavy manual labor, six days a week, from sunrise to sunset. It was into this environment that I was born in Mt. Holly, New Jersey, just a few miles from the family farms, in 1938.

Although I have a very limited memory of my early life on our farm, there are a few things I do recall. At the age of five, I remember my mother giving me a bath in a washtub in our kitchen; at that time, we did not have an indoor bathroom. I'm sure that I received more than one bath in five plus years, but I only remember one. Related to not having an indoor bathroom, I do have one vivid, not-so-pleasant memory: our outhouse!

Although I was born during the Great Depression, our family was always blessed with having sufficient food to eat, primarily because my mother, grandmother, and aunt canned fruit and vegetables all summer. My dad loved homemade ice cream. Except for a small Allis Chalmers tractor and the farm truck, the only other gas-powered gadget on the farm was an ice cream churn. It was a homemade device that in no way would meet today's OSHA standards, but it cranked out some good ice cream.

## TESTIMONIES OF GRACE

Henry was a hired hand that worked around the farm. Even though he had been disabled by polio as a child, he got around quite well on crutches. Henry was a jack-of-all-trades when it came to repairing farm equipment, so my dad hired him on a part-time basis to do just that, keep the farm equipment running.

The one thing I remember about Henry is that he gave me a hatchet for my sixth birthday. For a six-year-old, it was the best of all possible gifts. My hatchet had a smooth wooden handle, a shiny sharp blade, and a leather blade protector. I tested my hatchet on some small saplings that had grown up around the barn. I placed my hatchet under my bed for safekeeping, but not for long. The next day Henry dulled my hatchet, supposedly for my safety, on one of the large rocks that lined our driveway. My hatchet had large chips in the blade. It was useless! I cried and took it to the outhouse and bid it goodbye.

I hated Henry!



Just two months after my sixth birthday, on a pleasant July evening in 1944, Dad was tending his corn crop in the field across the road from our home. I was playing in the front yard while Mother and my two younger sisters were inside. Mother hurriedly gathered her children

## 63 YEARS – KEN'S STORY

together and was headed down the driveway toward the road with my younger sisters, Fay and Ruth, in a baby carriage and me in tow. From sensing the anxiety in my mother's voice, I realized that something was terribly wrong. Before we were halfway down the driveway, a shot rang out and I saw my mother collapse, struck by a single shot to the temple from a small caliber pistol.

I raced across the yard, jumped the ditch, crossed the road, and headed through the cornfield to find my dad. Together, we returned to the front yard and we saw the tragedy: Mother laying on the gravel driveway in a pool of blood, my two sisters still in the baby carriage and Henry lying on the front porch.

Not knowing why Henry was in this position, Dad approached cautiously and found that Henry had turned the gun on himself. He appeared to be alive, but unconscious. The pistol was on the front porch floor next to Henry. Dad picked up the pistol and pointed it at Henry, ready to empty the remaining four shots into Henry's head when he heard a still, small voice say, "Don't do it." Hearing that voice, Dad tossed the gun a safe distance away and went to see what he could do for his wife and daughters.

By that time, a neighbor had called the sheriff, and, within a few minutes, both the sheriff and an ambulance arrived. Mother and Henry were placed in the same

## TESTIMONIES OF GRACE

ambulance. The neighbors took care of my sisters and me. Dad followed the ambulance to the hospital. Mother died in the ambulance. Henry survived his self-inflicted gunshot through his mouth and neck.

At the age of six, I was not ready to be a motherless child.

Who was going to tuck me in at night?

Who would fix my breakfast?

Who would hold me when I was afraid?

Who would take me to my first day of school that fall?

Sometimes God knows that we need Him and He sends people to be His voice, His hands and feet, His hugs and kisses, His tears, His compassion.

Many people came to the aid of our grieving family, including neighbors, family members, law enforcement, a compassionate judge, and people we did not even know.

At Mother's visitation a couple of days after her death, Dad helped me place three white roses in her hands, representing her three children. That's my last memory of my mother.

## 63 YEARS – KEN'S STORY

The untimely death of my mother had a major emotional effect on my life.

I jumped at the sound of loud noises.

I had nightmares.

I became a bed-wetter.

I couldn't get out of my mind the picture of my mother in her casket, holding the roses from her three children.

Mother's death also impacted my dad to the point that he sold the farm and recommitted his life to Christ. Knowing that he could not raise three children by himself, my three-year old sister went to live with dad's sister and my one-year old sister went to live with Mother's sister. Dad and I moved into my paternal grandparents' home.

As the only witness to my mother's murder, the judge who had been assigned the case asked Dad to bring me to the courthouse to speak with him. I recall going up the courthouse stairs and Dad telling me to not be afraid and to just tell the judge what I saw. We were accompanied to the courtroom and the judge came down from the bench and asked us to sit down on one of the benches at the side of the room. He pulled up a chair and I told him everything I had seen. At the end of the meeting, Dad told the judge

## TESTIMONIES OF GRACE

that he and the family did not want Henry to be given a death sentence. We learned that Henry had pleaded guilty and was sentenced to life in the New Jersey State Prison in Trenton. Near the end of his life, Dad shared what he believed the motive was: he had heard that Henry was in love with my mother and that he wasn't willing to let anyone else have her if he couldn't.

I still hated Henry.



My paternal grandparents, especially my grandmother, were very loving. She did everything possible to cheer and encourage me. She loved to tell Bible stories. I still remember some of her stories like “Jonah and the Whale<sup>1</sup>,” “Daniel in the Lion’s Den<sup>2</sup>,” and “Jesus in the Manger<sup>3</sup>.” Grandma didn’t just read the stories from the King James Bible; she filled in the details, not just with words, but with animation. I can see her now describing the whale by spreading out her arms and clamping down on me. It scared me, but she was quick to turn that big bite into a big hug and kiss. She loved to take the train to shop in Philadelphia and we had great times going to the city.

Grandpa was a man of few words. He was up at daybreak and, following breakfast, he was headed to the field or orchard until exactly noon. If you were in the field



## 63 YEARS – KEN'S STORY

with him, you would see him checking his Hamilton pocket watch when it was getting near noon. He was never late for lunch: at 11:55, he was at the water pump at the back of the house, washing his hands and face. His pocket watch is a keepsake that I treasure today.

Grandpa and my Uncle Wilmer were expert farmers. Grandpa's specialty was cantaloupes and sweet corn and my uncle's was peaches and strawberries. Any time I was in the field or barns with Grandpa, he would be showing me how to do whatever task was at hand. It was at this early stage of farming that I figured out that this would definitely not be my career.

Dad and I stayed with my grandparents for a year or so after Mother's death. While living there, Dad worked at multiple jobs like making pipe at a steel mill, helping in the fields and orchards on the two farms, delivering truckloads of produce to the Campbell's Soup Company in Camden, and taking what Campbell's didn't need at the time to the farmer's market in Trenton. Going to the farmer's market was really the only thing that I liked about farming, because Dad would always give me a quarter to buy a hotdog and a bottle of chocolate milk. He'd even tell me to keep the change!

My Uncle Robert, Dad's youngest brother, served as a Marine in World War II. While attacking one of the

## TESTIMONIES OF GRACE

Japanese islands, he suffered major shrapnel wounds to both legs. When he was able, they moved him to California to recuperate. After six months or so of rehabilitation, he returned to New Jersey. I remember him coming on crutches into my grandparents' living room with a big smile on his face. I know that this was both a day of joy and pain for the family. Uncle Robert slowly recuperated to the point of playing golf and taking a job as Secretary of the Camden County YMCA. Uncle Robert became one of my primary mentors and encouraged me to attend college. He helped me earn money by providing me with a job at YMCA Camp Ockanickon every summer during my high school and college years.

Perhaps the most memorable event of the year and a half that I lived with my grandparents after Mother's death was a visit to my aunt and uncle's home in Pennsylvania. I was consigned to a couch on the enclosed front porch. I got tucked in under four or five quilts and blankets. I could see the moonlight's glow upon the snow-covered trees across the road. I had not been in bed for more than ten minutes when I heard the faint ringing of bells. At first, I thought that someone had put a record on the Victrola, but the sound of the bells got louder and louder and, soon, I could tell that the bells were coming down the road in front of the house. Coming down the road was a sleigh pulled by two horses. When I recognized the red tasseled hat, I knew

## 63 YEARS – KEN'S STORY

it was Santa! I ran into the house and down the stairs, hollering “Uncle Robert, I saw Santa Claus! He just came down the road in a sleigh!” It was several years later that Uncle Robert told me that it was a custom for one of the neighbors to do a Santa sleigh ride on Christmas Eve if the weather permitted. For several years, I had thought they staged the Santa sleigh ride just for a six-and-a-half-year-old motherless boy. It didn't matter. It was the best Christmas ever for me!

In my life, especially those few years after Mother's death, family, friends, and people who I didn't know reached out to help and encourage me when I was hurting. One was the elderly Sunday School teacher at our small church, who taught us and took us to the park and let us swim in the Delaware River. This was an outpouring of God's grace through the heart, voice, hands, and feet of God's people. But I was still frightened by loud noises, I still laid awake at night, and, when I did go to sleep, I had nightmares. I still longed for my mother.

I hated Henry.



December 7, 1945, about seventeen months after Mother's death, was a memorable day for two reasons: it was the fourth anniversary of the Japanese attack on Pearl

## TESTIMONIES OF GRACE

Harbor and it was the day that a seven-and-a-half-year-old boy received one of the greatest gifts a motherless child could receive: a new mom and a big sister.

My mother's death had a major impact on my dad. It was shortly thereafter that Dad rededicated his life to Jesus Christ and was called into the ministry. In the fall of 1945, he enrolled at God's Bible School in Cincinnati, Ohio. It was there that Dad met Irene, who had also been called to ministry. Irene's husband had been killed in an accident at a steel mill in Detroit. Having both experienced the loss of a spouse, they shared each other's life stories and became friends over the period of a few weeks.

To help pay tuition, Dad drove the college bus. One evening, at the end of their second date, which consisted of riding in the college bus to get ice cream at a local drug store, Dad asked, "Irene, do you think you will get married again?" Being somewhat blindsided, Irene responded, "Well, I'm not sure right now." Dad possessed many spiritual gifts, but patience was not one of them. He told Irene, "Well, let me know in the morning!"

That evening, Irene prayed about this proposal and talked about it with her eleven-year-old daughter, Claudia. When Claudia found out that my dad had two young daughters and a son, she was all in since she had had no sisters or brothers. Within a few weeks, Dad and Irene were

## 63 YEARS – KEN'S STORY

married. By saying yes, Irene became the mom of four children, three of whom she had not yet met! I called her Mom from day one.

It was Christmas 1945 that my grandmother told me that Dad was coming home from God's Bible School, that he was married, and that I had a new eleven-year-old sister. That was quite a Christmas! Claudia and I were assigned to a bedroom at the top of the stairs. In our pajamas, we just sat in bed and talked, or maybe I should say that Claudia talked, and talked, and talked. I'm not sure what time we went to sleep, if we ever did, but, in those hours, we became good friends, a true brother and sister. Since that time, I have always addressed Claudia as my sister, not my step-sister.

Following the Christmas gathering, Dad and my new mom prepared to move to her home in Dearborn, Michigan. On the way to Dearborn, we stopped to pick up my four-year-old sister in Pennsylvania and then headed on to Dearborn. My youngest sister remained with our aunt and uncle and joined the rest of the family a few months later.

Dad began his ministry as pastor of a small church just west of Detroit, and, after serving there for six months, we moved to a small farm in Romulus, Michigan in the summer of 1946. Dad served as the pastor of Romulus

## TESTIMONIES OF GRACE

Wesleyan Methodist Church. With our new family of six and dad's low salary as a minister, he took on extra jobs. He planted and cultivated a large garden, drove a school bus, and did maintenance work at the grammar school as well as odd jobs around town.

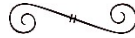
A year and a half after moving to Romulus, our family of six grew to seven; I had a brother, Paul. I remember the day Mom and Paul returned home from the hospital. I ran all the way home to see the little fellow. For some reason, I thought I would have a playmate. I had never seen a newborn baby up close; I said, "Look how little he is! I guess it will be some time before we can go ice skating together." Being nine years older than Paul, we never had the opportunity to really "play" with each other.

In 1948, our family came close to having another tragic event. Paul, at fifteen or sixteen months old, while playing outside, fell head first into a ten-gallon crock that was used to catch rainwater from one of the downspouts at home. Had it not been for a telephone repairman that happened to be close by and had been trained in artificial respiration, Paul would not have survived.

When I think back to the few years following the death of my mother, I realize that even through tragedies "that all things (do) work together for good<sup>4</sup>." After being a motherless child, God had placed a big sister and a

wonderful mom in my life, a lady that was in every respect a mother to me. Over that period of three years, I became less afraid of the dark, loud noises did not bother me, and I ceased to have nightmares.

But I still hated Henry.



After living in Romulus for three years, we moved to Central, a small town of 500 people, in western South Carolina. There were two reasons we moved: Dad wanted to continue his ministerial education and he wanted a change of climate. A couple feet of snow on the ground from Thanksgiving to Easter in Michigan was a bit too much.

Our family of seven moved into a two-bedroom/one-bathroom house, which was a little tight, to say the least. We lived just off campus near Central Wesleyan College (now Southern Wesleyan University). Dad took on the pastorate of two churches: Pickens View and Martin Grove, both Wesleyan Methodist churches.

I do not recall the date that I accepted Christ as my Savior, but it was at age twelve that I walked down the aisle and knelt at the altar on a Sunday evening at the Central Wesleyan Methodist Church on the college campus. I can't

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say that I had a profound change of heart, mind, or character, but I knew one thing: I was a child of God<sup>5</sup>.

Dad's pastoral income from the two small churches was not sufficient to support a family of seven, so he took on various side jobs: produce manager at the local grocery store, second shift worker at a cotton mill, clerk at a men's store, a house-to-house dry cleaning delivery route, and printing press operator. And, though our yard was small, he planted a vegetable garden behind the house.

As if pastoring two churches and working part-time jobs was not enough to keep Dad busy, he started a Boy Scout troop of six or seven boys in the neighborhood. I came to love the outdoors, camping, bicycling, and canoeing, but not so much hiking. It was my opinion that if you could bike or canoe, why hike? Scouting was a positive venture for me that helped to bring me out of my depression over the loss of my mother.

Living less than a quarter mile from the high school, on the first day of my freshman year, two or three of my friends and I placed ourselves in a perfect viewing position in the administration building, less than 50 yards from the girls' dormitory. Wow! I knew right away that high school was going to be great; I had never seen so many beautiful young ladies. Over the next year or so, my fondness of the



## 63 YEARS – KEN'S STORY

Boy Scouts waned and my interest in the fairer sex increased.

During the summer months following my freshman year, I worked as a counselor at a YMCA camp. Being 500 miles from most of these young ladies, I thought it would be a good idea to keep in contact with them. I wrote each of them a letter. Each of them responded to my letter and we corresponded throughout the summer. Little did I know that, a few years later, I would marry one of these young ladies.

About the middle of our sophomore year in high school, Jane and I started to hang out together after class and in the evenings. Being less than sixteen, the minimum age for dating at the school, we just had to steal away whenever and wherever possible in order to be together. Our relationship was not entirely consistent -- we had a couple of break-ups -- but, thanks to my persistence, it didn't take more than a few weeks to get back together.

I loved the environment of our high school and junior college. The rules and regulations of the school were strict, but, in looking back, I know that it was good for me. For the most part, it kept me out of trouble and strengthened my faith in Christ. In September 1957, I enrolled as a junior at Guilford College, just outside of Greensboro, North Carolina. About the same time, at the

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age of nineteen, with about \$100 in my pocket and two more years of college ahead, it was with fear and trepidation that I asked Jane's dad for her hand in marriage. I had expected him to say, "Well, Ken, why don't you come back in a couple years when you can support my daughter." I was bowled over when he said, "Yes," and gave me her hand. Up until that time, this was my happiest day ever!

But I still hated Henry!



Jane and I were married on September 7, 1958, just a few days before my senior year in college. At this point, I had about \$300 in my pocket, but, with the help of wedding gifts, my job maintaining the landscaping at the church and adjoining cemetery, and Jane's full-time job at Southern Bell, we were able to pay tuition and to rent a small trailer about five miles off campus, right across the street from the church I had attended for my junior year in college and next door to its parsonage. The rent was \$35 per month, including water and electricity. In addition to our low rent and utilities, the pastor and his lovely wife would have us over for dinner once or twice per week.

Following graduation in May 1959, with a degree in mathematics, I worked for three years at Pilot Life Insurance Company in the claims and actuarial department.

## 63 YEARS – KEN’S STORY

It didn’t take long for our family of two to expand to four: our son, Robert, born November 7, 1959, and our daughter, Linda, on July 3, 1961.

By the summer of 1962, I realized that the insurance business was not for me. Having seen an advertisement in the *Atlanta Journal* for programmers at Brown Engineering in Huntsville, Alabama, I sent my resume and a cover letter to the company, and, without the first inkling of what programming was, they hired me, put me through a two-week training session, and sent five other young men and me out to Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville.

Computers were in their infancy in 1962. There were no college degrees in Computer Science at that time and the art of software development was in pre-infancy. Our team of six worked ten- to twelve-hour days learning and doing by trial and error until we mastered the job. This job was the beginning of my career as a program analyst. Over the course of 49 years in software development, I never had a job that I did not like. I could not have asked for a better career. Life was good.

But I still hated Henry!



One Sunday morning in 2005, my friend, Sidney, said, “Hey, Ken, I know I’ve invited you to attend a Walk

## TESTIMONIES OF GRACE

to Emmaus<sup>6</sup> several times in the past two or three years, but I just thought that this might be the right time for you.”

The Walk to Emmaus begins with an invitation from a sponsor. It is an experience of Christian spiritual renewal that begins with a three-day course in Christianity. These three days provide the attendees, referred to as pilgrims, an opportunity to meet Jesus Christ in a new way as God’s grace and love is revealed to them through other believers.

It was in March 2006, that Sidney came by the house and we headed off to Camp Sumatanga in Gallant, Alabama, about 100 miles from home and about fifteen miles from civilization and cell phone service. The first thing I noticed in the auditorium at the camp was three tables full of food. I thought, “I think I’m going to be okay here at Sumatanga.” This feeling didn’t last too long. After introductions all around and a short devotional, the leader said, “Okay, guys, we are going to all head to the dorm, but here’s what I want you to do: as you go to the dorm, please be silent and maintain that silence until we let you know sometime tomorrow.”

Well, the silence didn’t last long in my room. Within a few minutes after going to bed, my two roommates started a duet: One snored tenor and the other snored bass. I wrapped my head in my pillow, covered my ears as much

as possible, and just laid there until what seemed like almost daybreak when I finally dozed off. Just about the time I had fallen asleep, I was startled by the ringing of cowbells and some sub-humans singing off-tune in the hallway, “Rise and Shine and Give God the Glory, Glory...” I made it through the Benedictine silence, the duet, the ringing of cowbells, and the off-tune singing. Just before breakfast, the silence was lifted and we began day one of my Walk to Emmaus. These three days were life-changing for me.

Following the three-day experience, participants are joined in small groups to support each other in their ongoing walk with Christ. Through the formational process of accountable discipleship in small groups and participation in the Emmaus community, each participant's individual gifts and servant-leadership skills are developed for use in the local church and its mission. Participants are encouraged to find ways to live out their individual call to discipleship. Prior to my Walk to Emmaus, I had lived a sheltered life. My Christian life had been one of church administration, serving as church treasurer, leading fundraisers for new church facilities, serving on multiple building committees, serving as chair of the Administration Board, etc. After my Walk, my Christian-life priority pivoted from administration to mission.



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I always hate it when someone says, “God told me to tell you...” as if God had to have a middleman to call me up. On the way home from Camp Sumatanga, Sidney, my Walk to Emmaus sponsor, didn’t use those words. He was more direct.

He said, “Hey Ken, you’re going to serve on Kairos 43. It is coming up in a few months.”

I said, “I am? What is Kairos?”

“Oh, it’s Emmaus behind bars. Don’t worry; we’ll be going to some training sessions that will bring you up to speed before we go in.”

By this time, I had gotten used to Sidney telling me what God wanted me to do, so I agreed. The mission of Kairos Prison Ministry is to share the transforming love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ and to impact the hearts and lives of incarcerated men, women, and youth, as well as their families, so that they may become loving and productive citizens of their communities.

My assigned position at the weekend program for Kairos 43 was to be a Family Servant; in other words, I was to make sure the six inmates and three team members at my table had coffee, lemonade, cookies, lunch, and dinner. All the gray-heads on the Kairos team told me how great it was to be a family servant: “The best position I’ve ever had!”

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they said. What they didn't know was that I had experienced essential tremor since about the age of 50.

Essential tremor is a neurological disorder that causes an involuntary and rhythmic tremor. It can affect almost any part of your body, but the trembling occurs most often in your hands, especially when you do intentional tasks, such as using a fork or knife to cut a steak, buttoning shirts, tying shoelaces, or simply carrying a cup of coffee.

At our last team meeting prior to our Kairos weekend, I told our lead family servant that I was getting a little antsy about pouring coffee, tea, and lemonade at prison. I could just see myself splashing a cup of hot coffee all over a tough inmate. He listened as I described my tremor and I gave him a demonstration involving trying to carry two cups full of water; it wasn't pretty!

This didn't seem to trouble him. He simply said, "Lets pray about it." He gathered up the other six table servers, who all surrounded me, placing their hands on my shoulders and praying. They prayed that God would simply control my hands during the weekend. I served the nine men at my table all weekend without spilling a drop of coffee or anything else. My hands were rock-steady throughout the weekend. This simple miracle gave me the assurance that God is there for us; all we have to do is ask.

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I wish that the prayer hadn't been limited to four days because come Monday morning, my tremor was back to normal.

One of the main themes of a Kairos weekend is forgiveness, and, by Saturday night, we were listening to the final talk before holding a forgiveness ceremony in which we would offer up names of those we needed to forgive. Then I got out my paper, prayed for the Holy Spirit to bring any names to mind, and heard him ask about Henry.

I wrote Henry's full name on my sheet of paper and shortly afterward we all went outside, formed a circle, and, table-by-table, we prayed, asking God to accept our acts of forgiveness. We placed our lists in a metal bucket. When all of the lists were in the bucket, one of the clergy members set fire to the lists. As I watched the smoke ascend into the night sky, I felt a burden lifted off my shoulders that I had carried for 63 years.

I forgave Henry.



A few months after my first Kairos weekend, I began to live out my new focus on mission, my ministry now two-fold: coordinating a monthly worship service at Limestone Correctional Facility and helping inmates who are paroled or who have reached the end of their sentence.



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In the past twelve years, I have helped a dozen or more ex-inmates by providing transportation home on the day they were released, helping them locate a halfway house, paying their rent at a halfway house or motel, and providing clothing, furniture, food, hygiene products, and more.

At the end of 2015, I felt compelled to broaden my prison ministry. In a conversation with the chaplain at the Limestone Correctional Facility, I asked him if I could serve as an assistant chaplain at Limestone. He said yes. I went through the necessary training, and since then I have served as an assistant chaplain one day per week.

What I have learned from my experience as an assistant chaplain is that not all inmates are villains. For many of the inmates in prison, the very act of incarceration is a turning point in their lives, turning away from sin and riotous living toward a Christ-centered life. I know that we have all heard the term “jailhouse religion,” and, while it is a fact in some cases, for many, it is not. Having talked one-on-one to hundreds of men in the course of my ministry, dozens have told me that being incarcerated is the best thing that happened to them. I always ask, “Why?” and their response is, “If I hadn’t been incarcerated, I wouldn’t be alive today. If drugs didn’t kill me, I would have been killed or seriously wounded in a gang fight.” In addition, many of them have said that they probably would not have accepted

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Jesus Christ as their savior outside of prison, primarily because they had strayed away from Christ and the church in their teens. Prison is a dark place. Were it not for the light of Christ that is manifested by many of the inmates, it would be even darker. Some of the most dedicated Christians that I have ever known are in prison, or, as ex-felons, are now living a Christ-centered life on the outside.

I've asked myself several times, "Why prison? Are there not easier ministries?" After more than a decade in prison ministry, I've come to the conclusion that it all had to do with Henry, the man who murdered my mother. Many times I thought about Henry and his incarceration in the New Jersey state prison in Trenton. I can only hope that there was a chaplain, a religious volunteer, or an inmate that led him to Christ, even if he was on his deathbed; it's never too late to accept God's grace or forgiveness<sup>7</sup>.



Dad and I seldom talked about the murder of my mother or about Henry. Once, while visiting him when he was 101 years old, I asked him when he forgave Henry. His answer was, "When I threw the gun aside." I thought, "Wow! It took Dad a few minutes to forgive Henry, it took me 63 years." But it doesn't matter whether it is a few minutes or 63 years, it is never too early or too late to forgive someone who has done you wrong.

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From the time Dad was 99 years old, his family would celebrate his birthday with him each year. When he was 102, he needed to have his pacemaker replaced; he told the surgeon he wanted one with longer battery life this time and the surgeon laughed and offered him a lifetime warranty. His 103rd and 104th celebrations were at the nursing home where he lived. The nursing home staff sponsored his 104th birthday party for him and invited his family members and nursing home neighbors to join in the celebration. Dad was in good spirits and had a good time playing bingo and eating birthday cake.

According to his roommate, at 6:15 am, just two weeks after his 104th birthday, dad woke up, sat up in bed, and said, "Well, praise the Lord. I'm going Home. I'm going to be with Jesus. I'm going to be with Irene." When the nurse checked on him at 6:30, dad had relocated from the nursing home to his heavenly Home. I hope that when my time comes, I will be like Dad and say, "Well, praise the Lord. I'm going Home."

### More to Think About from Ken

Ken's story is a powerful example of the necessity of forgiveness. Like accepting God's grace for salvation, it is never too late to forgive. Ken waited 63 years to forgive; after he did, he decided to find out what happened to Henry

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and learned that Henry had died in prison almost 50 years earlier. Ken had hated a dead man for nearly half a century! There is an old saying about unforgiveness being a poison that you drink hoping it will harm the other person. Of course, in reality, it only harms you. This is why Jesus put such an emphasis on forgiveness, even putting it in the Lord's Prayer: Forgive others as you have been forgiven<sup>8</sup>. We will never completely walk in the freedom of Christ until we learn to forgive.

The scriptures are full of verses on the importance of forgiveness, as noted even in the words of Jesus Himself. There are also innumerable resources on the topic of forgiveness. Ken's favorite is a pamphlet called *The Forgiveness of God*, written by Mart DeHaan<sup>9</sup>, as part of the Discovery Series from Our Daily Bread Ministries. In it, DeHaan starts with our need to forgive ourselves and accept God's total forgiveness of us through Christ's finished work of the cross. He goes on to cover the aspects of God's forgiveness before covering the forgiveness of people. It is important to realize that forgiveness does not mean putting yourself in a position to be hurt again. Forgiving an embezzler doesn't mean you put them in charge of the treasury; forgiving an abuser doesn't mean you let them work in the nursery; and forgiving someone who has harmed you doesn't mean you allow them to remain in your life if they are unsafe. Forgiveness for some

is quick, like it was for Ken's father; for others, it is a process that requires going to God for His grace again and again. Ways you will know you have forgiven include your emotions when you think of the person or event, whether you maintain any ill will or desire to get even, and whether you continue to tell people the story in a gossiping sense to make sure as many people know as possible. If you have a surge of anger when you hear a name, want to get back at them some way, or talk about it over and over for no beneficial reason, it may be time to go back to God in prayer for that hurt.

Other books on the topic of forgiveness include *Total Forgiveness* by R.T. Kendall<sup>10</sup>, *Helping People Forgive* by David W. Augsburger<sup>11</sup>, and *Five Steps to Forgiveness* by Everett Worthington<sup>12</sup>. These all give real scripture-based and practical advice on how to forgive those who have wronged you and to forgive yourself. Whether you use these resources or stick with the scriptures and prayer, forgiveness is a fundamental element of the Christian life. No matter what trauma we have experienced, we are called to forgive.

Prayer verse

Matthew 6:14-15 (NIV) For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also

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forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

*Lord Jesus, I know that You have called me to forgive and that I can't live a healthy, whole life without forgiving those who have harmed me. Call to my mind right now those who I continue to hold in unforgiveness and grant me your grace to forgive them ...*