

## PASTOR PETE'S TESTIMONY

My name is Pastor Peter Friese. I'd like to take this time to share my personal testimony with you. I have often wondered why God would choose me? I still can't believe it, other than to say it is only His grace. If you feel useless in the hands of the Almighty God or as though God cannot use you, maybe my testimony will be an encouragement to you!

I was born on June 24, 1962, in Red Wing Minnesota. During the winter of 1969, I remember going to the Wednesday night Awana program at our church. On one particular Wednesday night, an older lady shared with me the love of Jesus Christ. She told me that God loved me and that Jesus Christ had died on the cross to pay for my sin, and that if I would simply confess my sin and receive Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior, that God would forgive me and cleanse me from all my sin, and when I died, I would go to heaven. I was filled with joy to know that I could be forgiven, that my conscience could be cleared and that I could know that I had eternal life! On that night I confessed to God that I was a sinner and that I needed His forgiveness, and by faith, I invited Jesus Christ to come into my life. That night was the most spectacular night of my life! For the first time in my life, I experienced a peace and a joy that I had never before known, and I knew that I knew God. I could feel His presence in my life. I could feel His forgiveness. I had experienced His mercy, His grace and His unconditional love!

Prior to receiving Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior, I had had head knowledge of who God was and that He had sent His only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ to come and die upon a cross to pay for my sin, but yet until I actually received His gift of forgiveness, I was still separated from Him. That night I was so filled with joy that I went home and asked each of my family members if they knew Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. I couldn't stop talking about my love for Jesus Christ, and I started telling my friends about Him, and inviting them to Wednesday night Church. My mom gave me a King James Version bible (pew edition- hard cover, no notes or commentary or even a concordance!), but I loved it! I fell in love with the Word of God and I couldn't stop reading it and taking notes and seeking to be with other Christians! Jesus Christ had truly become the Lord and love of my life. I adore Him! He is mine, and I am His! To know the One True Living God, who would come and die upon a cross to pay the debt for my sins, from that day on, there was nothing else that I wanted to do with my life other than to follow Him every day of my life! (When you fall in love with Jesus Christ, He spoils you to all the lures of this world!)

For the first 2 years, being a Christian was awesome! God was great, I was forgiven and life was easy. But soon the honeymoon ended. I began to grow cold, life became frustrating and reading my bible didn't really have the same appeal that it did in the beginning. What had happened? How had I lost my first love? How had I drifted from the One I loved? For several years after receiving Christ into my life, I began to back slide until one summer day, when I was 13 years old, after stacking firewood in our garage, I had a seizure and collapsed on the spot as I entered the house. I was immediately rushed to the hospital where I lay in intensive care for a period of 2 weeks. The hospital ran all kinds of tests in desperation trying to discover what was wrong with me. After many tests at the Rochester Mayo Clinic in Rochester Minnesota, it was determined that I had contracted "encephalitis", which turned out to be an epidemic that year in the Minneapolis area.

That summer the hospitals in the Minneapolis area were filled with people who had contracted

encephalitis, and apparently the doctor told my parents that I had the worst case in the entire hospital.

For two weeks I experienced extreme pressure on my brain, it was like the worst migraine head ache you've ever had, times 1000. I couldn't sleep, eat, or do anything but moan in complete agony. To make matters worse, because doctors had no idea what was wrong with me (until several weeks after I was released), they didn't know what type of medication to give me in order to reduce or eliminate the pain and swelling. So I just lay there day after day in complete agony. I knew that I was sick, but I really had no idea that I was getting worse, and that I could actually die from what I had.

For 2 weeks my condition continued to deteriorate until one Saturday night, the doctors told my parents that my body couldn't take any more and that night my fever and the swelling on my brain was going to climax. There were only three possible outcomes; miracle healing, coma or death. The Doctors told my parents "tonight is the night, if you believe in prayer, this would be the night to pray." That hot August night in Minneapolis Minnesota, as I lie there in my hospital bed dying, that night was about to determine my future. "Lord, where are You? Why am I going through this? Don't You still love me? Why am I here?" A thousand thoughts so often cross our minds when we stare eternity in the face.

With the news, my dad, our Pastor and the elders of our church gathered together at the church for a prayer meeting to ask God for a gift of healing upon my body. The Doctors had done all they could, I had the best medical care money could buy in the world renowned 'Mayo Clinic', yet I was in a life and death struggle that only God could heal. My life was teetering on the edge of eternity and only God had the power to save my life.

I remember that night in particular because the pain had become so intense that I could not even stand the sound of hearing my mother turn the pages of her bible as she sat next to my bed reading her bible. As she sat there, silently reading her bible, I remember hearing the sound of her turning the page her bible, and I told her to 'put that thing away, and stop making so much noise!' She didn't say anything, but she silently closed her bible and began to pray for me. She told the Lord that she loved me, but she loved Him more and that if I was going to waste my life living for myself, then she asked the Lord to take me home. She knew that I was His child, and that if I died that night, I would forever be in the presence of the Lord.

That night around 11 pm, my mother left the hospital completely exhausted from sitting with me for hours listening to me moan and groan. She had prayed for a miracle. My dad and the elders of our church had prayed for a miracle, but nothing had happened before she left. But God's timing is not always our timing. Sometimes God heals instantly. Sometimes God heals over time, and sometimes God delays in saying 'yes'. So it was. Sometime around midnight that same Friday night, by the supernatural power of the One True Living God, He healed me! Instantly I felt my fever leave me and for the first time in roughly two weeks, I fell asleep and I slept soundly the whole night through! And when I woke up, I felt awesome and I ate 2 full breakfasts! God had truly healed me. Instantly, immediately, in His way, by His power, He had retrieved my life from the brink of eternity. Isn't He wonderful?! I didn't do anything to deserve to be healed; He just loves me and granted me a second chance to live for Him all the days of my life.

The hospital staff was absolutely shocked at this miracle, and when my mother walked into my room early that morning, I was sitting up eating my second breakfast and praising God!

My mom had mentally prepared herself to sit and listen to me moan again all day, but to her delight, JESUS CHRIST had touched my body that night and He had completely healed me of my encephalitis! It was a miracle, it was un-explainable, but what an opportunity my mom had to share Jesus Christ with my Jewish doctor. He couldn't deny the miracle that God had done!

From that summer on, I really felt the Lord beginning to work in my life. I didn't want to admit it, but I knew God had special plans for my life. For the next year, I really began to grow in my faith, and I began to feel the Lord removing things from my life. My interests were changing, my friends were changing, and my focus was changing. Over the course of the next year, people within our church could discern God's calling on my life. In fact, they started calling me 'Pastor Pete'. I didn't like the name, and I told them not call me that, I wasn't a pastor, and I had no plans be a pastor!

When I was 15 years old, I joined a local health club and started weight training. As I began to progress in my weight training, I was introduced to a Christian man, who had been attending my parents home bible study. We instantly hit it off with our mutual love for weight training. I had merely been weight training for personal pleasure, but he introduced me to the sport of 'Power Lifting' and I became addicted in a matter of just a short time. I soon began training up to seven day a week, and some days, I spent up to 6 hours in the weight room as I began training for various state-wide and National Power Lifting competitions. I began training with many state, and nationally recognized professional athletes, including several nationally ranked body builders and WWF wrestlers.

In the summer of 1978, our youth group got together with several other local youth groups in our area, and we watched the movie 'Pilgrims Progress' at one of the churches. During the movie, I sat with my buddies and fooled around through the entire movie. When the movie was over, a man who had been sitting behind me, rebuked me and said to me, 'I'm going to pray that God drops a log on your back to get your attention'. I laughed and didn't think anything of it until a month later when I was over at my training partner's house, training for a power lifting meet. I was working on a power lift called a 'dead lift', where you squat down and lift the weight off the ground as you stand up vertically. After lifting several lighter 'sets', I decided to see how much weight I could lift and so I loaded the bar with around 500 pounds. I put on my weight belt, bent over to 'dead lift' this weight off the ground, and as I stood up with the weight, I heard and felt a loud 'pop' in my back. I collapsed to the floor in excruciating pain and I thought I had broken my back.

As I lie there on that cold concrete floor, I wondered how I was going to get out of that basement. What made matters worse was, the pain was so bad, that I kept passing out, so I really have no idea how long I was actually stuck in that basement. My buddy was gone, in fact he was already at the power-lifting meet, and nobody even knew where I was. There was no phone in his basement, so I was forced to drag myself up the stairs with my upper body. When I finally climbed to the top of the stairs and made it to the phone, I called another friend of mine from church, and asked him to come get me and take me to the hospital. I guess he thought I was kidding, because his parents wouldn't let him come help me. Both my parents were at work and there was nobody else I could call, so I crawled

outside to my little Fiat car and drove myself home. When I got home, I called my parents, and they came right home and immediately rushed me to the hospital where they gave me heavy medications, and put me in a body-traction for 10 days. I was so addicted to weight training that after only a couple of days of being in the hospital, I was trying to figure out how to use the traction weights to exercise with. (Sort of like the patient who's in the hospital being kept alive on a respirator because of cigarette smoking, and they still want another cigarette. Pretty sad to see what an addiction can do to a person. What starts out so seemingly harmless, and maybe even beneficial, can so quickly become your 'god'.)

As I lay there in that hospital bed, the brought back to my memory words of that man who had rebuked that night just a few weeks earlier... "I'm going to pray that God drops a log on your back." Believe it or not, as I thought about those words, I began to praise God, because God loved me enough to not allow me to waste my life pursuing the wrong values of this life! The LORD truly had His hand on my life, and no matter what I did, I couldn't run from God-and I was so thankful that He loved me enough to chasten me and stop me before I wasted my life. My life was a true declaration of 'whom the Lord loves, He chastens'! I was being chastened, and I couldn't wait to tell the man who rebuked me, that God had answered his prayer!

At the age of 17, the hand of the Lord became very heavy upon my life, and I became very miserable because I still wanted some control over my life! I wanted to be saved, I wanted God to love me, but I also wanted to dictate to God what He could do with my life. And so I began to wrestle with God, as I rebelled against surrendering to His will and His calling upon my life. Week by week as the Holy Spirit continued to call me to total surrender, I resisted. I was afraid of what God wanted me to do.

For several weeks during that summer of 1979, I wrestled with God. Week by week, I began to surrender more and more areas of my life to Him. I felt like I was really doing good and that certainly God had to be impressed with me, because not only had I confessed and surrendered every area of known sin in my life to Him, but I had even opened my heart and surrendered to be a missionary or an elder or a Sunday school teacher! I thought, "What else could the Lord want? I just hope that He doesn't call me to be a pastor...that's where I'm going to draw the line!"

I had surrendered nearly every area of my life, and by the fall of 1979, the conviction of the Holy Spirit upon my heart was so strong that I couldn't sleep. I was miserable, and when I would lie down at night, all I could hear was the voice of the Lord, 'Peter, you will never be happy, until you surrender to My will for your life'.

I remember lying in bed one Saturday night feeling the tug of the Holy Spirit. I knew God wanted me to surrender EVERYTHING...including my willingness to become a Pastor- but I was afraid. I remember telling the Lord 'I'll surrender to do ANYTHING that You call me to do: I will be a Christian school teacher, I will be a missionary, I will be a youth worker, I will be anything You want me to be, but I DO NOT want to be a PASTOR!' I wrestled with the LORD for what seemed like ½ the night. I kept arguing with God, 'Lord, isn't it good enough that I'd be a missionary?' I could not find peace, and God would not let me go to sleep until I surrendered.

After hours of trying to talk God out of it, and using a lot Moses' excuses and a few of my own: I'm slow of speech; I'm shy; I'm not good in front of people; I panic just being in a large group-not to mention I sweat bullets if I'd have to speak in those environments. Even with all my perfect arguments, God wasn't going to change His mind as though somehow

I'd brought a new point to His attention that He'd not yet considered. The Lord knew that I was the shy boy who'd skip class and gladly take an 'F' rather than stand in front of our class and give an oral book report. I just can't tell you how painfully shy that I was! I was so shy that when we had to read aloud in class, as the teacher called on each student to read, I would carefully calculate my time to read, and I'd jump ahead and practice reading and re-reading my text in my mind so that when she called on me to read, I didn't have a panic attack! Really God, me? Preach?! In front of people?! How many? More than 2 or 3 at a time? Is this a typo? Is there another Peter Friese somewhere else in the world and maybe I've just received his 'memo' in error??? I couldn't escape it; I knew that God was calling me to preach. But I was so fearful, I trembled with anxiety at the very thought of standing before a group of people and speaking.

Do you know what I discovered that night? Not only does God really, really love me, but He really, really loves me! The sweet, precious, loving hand of God was upon me and He wasn't forcing me. He was calling me. He was wooing me to come and follow Him. He was assuring me, that everything would be alright, that He would provide and that He would take care of me. "Am I not the God who made your mouth?" "If you will trust Me, I will be your very provision."

With tears in my eyes, I said "Yes Lord I will trust You, I surrender to preach Your Word and I will be a Pastor!" At that very moment as I entered into the presence of the Lord, I felt as though time was standing still. The surreal peace and the joy and the intimacy that comes from being fully surrendered! Knowing that He will never leave me nor forsake me, and the assurance that what He has called me to do, He will enable me to fulfill. For the first time in many months, my wrestling with God had ended because I had fully, un-conditionally surrendered to the call of God upon my life. The only regret I felt that night after opening my heart to total surrender was, "Why had I waited so long?! I wish that I had yielded to the Holy Spirit the first time He knocked on the door of my heart!" But praise God He is persistent!

The fall of that same year I began attending a Christian school which offered a bible class for all the boys who felt called into the ministry. It was taught a college theologian, and the class was called 'Preacher Boys'. It was through this training that I was taught the fundamentals of 'Topical' sermon preaching. For the next 2 years, I attended various pastor's conferences with my pastor and youth pastor, in Hammond IN.

I wish I could say, my submission to the Lord was perfect, and I never looked back from the day I surrendered, but my life didn't go that way. Not because I didn't want to walk consistently with Christ, I just couldn't! And as a result, by the time I reached my senior year in High School, I was very burnt out on religion. Both the church and the high school I was attending were very legalistic, and I had come to a point of not being able to handle it any more. For some reason, and I wasn't quite sure why, but God was so different to me in my personal devotions and prayer time, than what my church and school were presenting Him as being. He was loving and forgiving and gracious and merciful in my prayer time, but at church and school, He was mean and angry at me, just waiting for me to mess up, because apparently, He was looking for a reason to punish me.

I feel terrible for all the legalistic ministries that exist today. They are a detriment to Christianity, and since I've been in the ministry now for more than 10 years, I can't tell you how many Christians that I have met who have been 'burned' by legalism! Maybe you can

relate? Maybe you too have been burned by one of these legalistic ministries? You're definitely not alone.

During this period of time in my life, no matter how many times I went forward on Sunday's, and confessed, and re-confessed, and dedicated, and re-dedicated and consecrated and re-consecrated and told God that I was sorry for failing again, and that THIS TIME LORD, I REALLY, REALLY, MEAN IT; no matter how many times I did that, I always failed, and I was so tired of being the theme of the Sunday morning brow-beating messages. The guilt trips by the preachers in the vain attempts to guilt us into disciplining our flesh into Biblical submission. I just couldn't do it!

Because every Sunday morning's message was topical, the pastor always preached on whatever sin was the most evident in the people from the week before. Too often the message that was preached on was essentially the same message as the week before. The entire premise was 'we need to learn to discipline our flesh'. I wanted to do what was right, I wanted to obey God, and I wanted to obey the Bible, but I just wasn't strong enough to discipline my flesh and I figured that there was something wrong with me. There was something apparently I had missed in one of my classes, one of the sermons, one of my bible studies..."What's wrong with me I wondered?" I didn't know why I couldn't control my flesh, I tried everything to bring it under submission, but I just couldn't control it. And all that these legalistic Christians in my life could do was to tell me how disappointed God was with me. I was so frustrated! I wasn't afraid of losing my salvation, but I just could not understand why God was so angry at Church and so merciful in my personal devotion time?!

In all the years that I had attended this particular church and High School, never once did I hear a message on Galatians 2:20 – the power of the crucified life! All I knew was, God saved me, now it's my turn to conform myself into Christ's image. (I hadn't read Gal 3:3!) I wanted to do the right thing, but I just kept failing. No matter how short I cut my hair, no matter how much I beat myself up, and forced myself to obey the Bible, I couldn't discipline myself to do what was right. I became intensely frustrated, I was an athlete; I trained almost every day of the week, 2-6 hours a day and I could push myself exceedingly in the weight room. I could make myself get up early and stay up late. I was able to accomplish every other goal I had set for myself, yet I could not master the power of my old nature.

During this time I became increasingly frustrated with my Christian life. The more I tried, the more I failed and the more discouraged I became. My bible reading became a chore, my prayer life became nearly non-existent and I didn't feel loved by church family nor by my Christian school leadership. I became bored with my 'Christian friends' who really only acted like Christians when they were in church, but otherwise so many of them lived even worse than my unbelieving weight training friends... so I began to bury myself in my sport of Power Lifting. I began to let out my frustrations in the weight room, and after every work out, I was guaranteed a euphoric 'high' from my intense training.

By 1980, I held all the state power lifting records for my weight and age group. As a result, I was invited to participate in the teen age Nationals Power Lifting meet in Chicago Ill, and I ended up placing somewhere in the top 10 nationally for my division. At that national power lifting meet, I met a man who was head of the Penn State athletic department, and he offered me a full College scholarship from Penn State if I would join their power lifting team. In my junior year of High School, the coach of our team was the

son of Bud Grant, the head coach of the Minnesota Vikings, and I was offered an opportunity to be a 'walk on player' on the Minnesota Vikings. I was bench pressing over 400 pounds, dead lifting nearly 600 pounds and squatting around 500 pounds. As I buried my frustration in the weight room, my weight training was becoming more and more of a 'god' in my life.

In the spring of 1981 I graduated from High school and that same spring my dad accepted a job that moved our family to Cody Wyoming. I moved with them, looking for new opportunities, and hoping to attend a Trade School while living at home. By the fall of 1981, I was extremely homesick for friends in Minnesota, so when my sister and brother in law came out for Christmas in 1981, I went back with them. In February of 1982 I was working full time and I moved in with a buddy of mine to try to help get on my feet financially, but after several months had passed, nothing seemed to come together and I grew increasingly dissatisfied with my life which caused me to once again seek the Lord.

In the spring of 1982, the Lord reminded me of my calling, and that what I was doing at that time was running from God, so I asked God's forgiveness, and moved home to Cody Wyoming and took a job roofing houses for the summer as I prepared to go to Bible College in the fall. In the fall of 1982, I attended a small private Baptist Bible College in Dunbar Wisconsin as I began to prepare for the ministry that God had for me. I attended for one semester, and due to finances, was unable to finish my Bible college education. I left Bible College with the intention of going getting a trade so that I could support myself later when I had planned to return and finish my bible college education.

After finishing my first semester of Bible College, I returned to Cody Wyoming and after a few months moved to Longmont Colorado where my dad had been transferred with a new company. That spring of 1983, I began corresponding with a girl by the name Celeste Ward, whom I had met at our church in Cody Wyoming. After only a few months of correspondence, Celeste and I developed a boy friend – girl friend relationship, and during that time, I was able to go to Cody a couple of times to see Celeste. Neither one of us was very fond of our long distance dating relationship, so I began praying about moving back to Wyoming where I could be closer to Celeste as we dated, but the Lord never opened that door.

The next year, in the summer of 1984, the company my dad had been working for had filed for bankruptcy, and my dad took a job working in Anchorage Alaska. Later that summer, our entire family moved to Alaska, and I decided to move with them due to financial reasons. Needless to say, that move ended my relationship with Celeste. We were having a rough enough of a time with 500 miles, let alone now, 3000 miles, so we ended our brief relationship. I went my way and Celeste went hers.

In the fall of 1984, I began attending a Business College in Anchorage. In November of that same year, I knew God was stirring my heart for marriage to come. The only problem was that at that time I wasn't even dating. I recall distinctively hearing the Holy Spirit say, 'You have already met the girl I have chosen for you'. After several days of prayer, I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt, that God had chosen Celeste to be my wife, so I began writing Celeste, and after only a couple of letters, and about 3 weeks later, I bought her a ring and proposed to her on Thanksgiving Day, 1984. We were married July 6, 1985 in Cody Wyoming, and two days after our marriage ceremony, we flew back to Anchorage Alaska and in the fall of '85, I began attending Trade School to learn the automotive trade. In the spring of 1988, my mom and dad, my brother Paul and his wife Jenna, and Celeste

and I moved to North Powder Oregon to buy a ranch, but the deal fell apart just before our closing. From there Celeste and I moved to Bellingham Washington where our son Ryan was born in the spring of 1989, and due to the high cost of living in Washing State, decided to move to N.E. Minnesota where my parents had purchased a farm,. After living in North Eastern Minnesota for about two years, in the spring of 1991, we ended up moving to Billings Montana, where we had our daughter Bethany in 1996.

Our years in Billings were very prosperous. We bought our 1st and 2nd houses. Celeste and I each had our own home businesses, plus I had a very lucrative job with great benefits in the automotive field. Because of our success, I became very materialistic. We made a lot of money, and we spent a lot of money. Within reason, we bought whatever we desired. We had a brand new tri-level home that was situated just above the Yellowstone River, in Shepherd Montana. We had several horses, tack, horse trailers, 2 new vehicles, campers, all of our home furnishings were new, and yet I was growing more and more empty with every month that passed and our marriage was really beginning to suffer.

It was during this time, my spiritual walk with the Lord hit an all time low. God was still at work in my life. He was allowing me to accomplish all my goals, allowing me to see that what I thought it would take to make me happy couldn't be bought, and it wasn't a physical location. I became increasingly empty and dissatisfied. At this point in our lives, we had all but quit going to church, and all our time was invested in us. Sunday mornings no longer meant fellowshiping with God's people, it meant sleeping in, or camping, or hunting or fishing or whatever else pleased me – but it no longer represented a time of being refreshed in the house of the Lord.

In spite of me, in spite of all my bad decisions and poor values, God still had His hand on us and especially me as the head of our home. I knew I had grown carnal. I had left Bible College to learn a trade so that I could return to finish my schooling, yet after learning my trade the money became so great, that I soon forgot the call of God upon my life. God had called me to Pastor. Nothing had changed, many years had passed, but God was patiently allowing me to run my course-allowing me to burn out on the desires of my flesh. Each year that passed in Billings became worse. I became more un-happy and more miserable and didn't even think that it was even possible for a Christian to feel as miserable as I had become. Celeste and I began to experience great stress in our marriage and we were drifting further and further apart. It's at those times of extreme emptiness and loneliness that even as a Christian that we begin to question divorce. "Maybe it's my spouse that's keeping me from being fulfilled?" "Maybe they're the reason I'm so un-happy?"

The inner stress in my life became so bad, that I began to experience 'panic attacks', and I began to develop a phobia of being alone. Financially, we lacked for nothing. We had a beautiful new home, 2 beautiful children and everything that money could buy, and yet I was so empty and so extremely lonely. As a born again Christian, I never thought that I could have ever felt so empty – what had happened to me?! What had happened to that love of God that I had felt on that Wednesday night when Jesus Christ came in and became the Lord of my life? Where had that peace gone that I had felt on that night when I surrendered to the will of God for my life?! By this time in my life, my heart had become very cold towards the things of the Lord.

In the spring of 1996, Celeste's mother Ernestine had come up to help Celeste during

the birth of Bethany, and during that time Ernestine read an article in the Billings Gazette, announcing the start up of a 'Calvary Chapel'. She said that she had heard some good things about Calvary Chapel, and she encouraged us to go. I was totally OK with the idea, as I had even remembered singing some Maranatha songs on our Bible College bus as we traveled to various churches. I was searching, even as a Born Again Christian I was searching for walk with God in public like I had known in my personal devotions. I'd never really ever given up on God; it's just that we were never really able to find a good church that really met us where we were at. Then we visited Calvary Chapel Billings...

We missed the 1st Sunday they started, but we made it the next week. We got directions to the North Park Gymnasium in Billings Montana, and showed up a few minutes before they started. It didn't take any time to realize that this church was way different from any other church I had ever been to. The people were real and loving, and they didn't seem to have that judgmental attitude about who I was. I loved the dress code too! It was so casual – suits and ties welcome, but not required. In fact, I even got the impression that God loved me just as much in jeans as He did with a suit and tie! Amazing! I think they may know the same Lord Jesus I know!

That morning, Pastor Wayne Hathaway got up, welcomed everyone, gave a few announcements, and then they began the worship service. By the second worship song, my hardened, calloused, cold heart, for the 1st time in 20 years had been pierced. For the very 1st time in my life, worship at church, was the same as my worship in private. Suddenly, 'God at church' was the same God I had known in my own time of devotions. For the 1st time in 20 years I felt the Grace of God upon my life, and I once again felt His call.

For the next 2 years, we continued to attend Calvary Chapel Billings, and for the next 2 years God began to work on my heart, even though I continued to pursue happiness through materialism. The longer I pursued my own plans, the more miserable I became.

In the fall of 1997, certain events took place in every area of my life that literally brought me to the 'end of myself'. I was so sick of myself and my flesh and my old nature, that I literally cried out to God that He either change me, or take my life. I couldn't stand myself any longer, and I knew I couldn't live another day if God wouldn't change me!

At that time we both felt the distinct calling of God to move back to Wyoming, so we sold our home in Billings, and moved to Sheridan Wyoming where we bought a little farm and I went to work for a GM dealership. But things were different now. No more living for myself, for money and pleasures and entertainment, from now on, I'm going to live for Jesus Christ. So we immediately began looking for a good bible teaching church. We visited several ministries, and finally thought we had found the right one, but following the second Sunday morning message, the pastor announced that he was leaving. We were so very discouraged because we couldn't find a good church, and now this was our main focus. No longer was church and fellowship something we didn't have anything else to do, it was a necessity. Church, and being in fellowship with other believers had become our main priority. If we wanted to be in fellowship with God, we knew that we had to be in fellowship with other strong believers. It was important to us individually, it was important to us as a family and it was important to us if we wanted a strong marriage.

Not being able to find a good bible teaching church in the Sheridan area, we began praying about leaving Sheridan Wyoming, in order to find a good church. I didn't care about how much money I was making and about how blessed we were with this new little

farm we'd just purchased – we needed more than anything to be in fellowship with other devoted believers.

Well, God did answer our prayers and we found out that there was a new little church starting in Buffalo Wyoming, called 'Calvary Fellowship'. They were meeting in one of the members homes, and so it was a very comfortable, non-threatening setting, and within a few weeks, Celeste was asked to lead worship, and I was asked to become one of the board members. We became very involved, and from that spring in 1998, to the spring of 1999, God began to work on my life like never before. For nearly 20 years I had run from God, and God had to teach me 20 years of lessons in 8 months. I recall those lessons as being the most intense lessons I have ever learned. Not only was every lesson God taught me that year more intense than any lesson I had ever learned, God was taking me through 2-5 of these major lessons each week. It was really a season of pruning. A time where God was removing all the old dead branches of my life, and there were many branches that needed to be cut off. You don't just run away from every trial in your life for twenty years and then expect one day to show up and be ready for ministry...it just doesn't happen. Even though God had called me to preach some 20 years earlier, that did not mean that I didn't need to be equipped first...and that was what season I was in – a time of some of the most excruciating stripping away of my flesh that I had ever known. Every trail produced two things; pain and growth. At the end of every trial I could always turn around see the changes God had just made in my life. I can't explain what He was doing, nor how He was doing it, it just happened.

God didn't ask me any questions and He didn't seek my approval with every trial I went through. He had already brought me to that point when He brought me to the end of myself. Sort of like the young man who signs up for boot camp – when he shows up for basic training the drill sergeant has a mission...convert a boy into a man. Same thing with our precious Lord. His mission is to prepare us for the work of the ministry, and it's not easy. It takes a lot of work and a lot of love by our Lord to keep on working on us, even when we're crying out, pleading with Him to stop. It takes a lot of love from an infinite God to keep working on us!

I don't really think that God is much into answering our questions during our trials and that's really OK. It's during those intense times that He only asks us, "Will you trust Me?" "In the end, you will see what I was doing, but for now, do you trust Me?" And that's it. We either grow through these times of extreme times of testing or we bail on God's plan for our lives and we run. There's no easy way to mature. I wish that there were an easy way to mature.

I wish that I could say today after being saved now for over 40 years, that I've learned the secret of 'how to escape every trial in your life, and yet end up a spiritual giant at the end'. What a great title for a book, and I'd probably sell a million copies, but the problem is, it would be a lie, because there really is no easy path, there's no short cut through the trials, there's no such thing as going from 'infant to giant' without paying the price. True spiritual growth only comes through surrender, trust and patience. All three qualities must be present through each trial if we want to come out victoriously. I don't believe that there is any other way to come into spiritual maturity, and the very thing that keeps me going in the midst of these horrible trials is the constant assurance that God loves me, that He is there with me and even though I may not understand why I am going through what I am going through, that's ok, God knows and my trust is in Him.

It saddens me today to look around at the 'Church' in America today and see how many immature Christians that there really are. Too many have bought into these methodology sermons of easy-escapism. "If God loves you and you have enough faith, then you can escape any hardship". What a lie, and how destructive to the faith of those who buy into it. Friend, we are living in hard times, and they are going to get a lot harder. I don't say that necessarily to cause you fear, but to encourage you to be ready – Jesus is coming back soon! My job as a Pastor is not to teach people how to escape from their trials, but how to endure, and how to endure well! More than anything else this life has to offer, one day when I stand before the King of Kings, I want to hear Him say to me, "Well done, good and faithful servant"! I know that the pathway to that treasure is only through the trials that refine us in the fire, preparing us for our heavenly home.

For eight solid months God worked on my life, burning out the dross, preparing me for the work of the ministry. During that time our pastor invited me out to dinner and he asked me if I was satisfied as an automotive technician, and if I could ever see myself doing anything else. He then proceeded to tell me he knew what God was going to do with my life, and asked me if I wanted to know. At that time I told him 'no', because I was too afraid of what God was up to, and due to the intensity of the lessons that God was taking me through, I told the pastor that I couldn't handle knowing what God was doing. Sometimes life can be so painful that we can only handle what going on for that day alone. This was one of those times. I had gone back to having an intense prayer life like I had never had before. During those 8 months, God took me deeper than I'd ever gone. It was a fearful experience, but it was the love of Jesus that kept me going. The lessons were excruciating. In fact, I remember telling God that 'there is no way I will ever run, but Lord would You please let me have a short break from these lessons'? God was always very fair, and at times He'd let up the pressure I was experiencing from my 'spiritual surgery', and then He'd begin again. This went on day after day for 8 months. Finally I was ready to hear what the pastor felt God was going to do with my life, so I asked the pastor what he felt God was going to do in my life. The pastor said, 'I believe that God has called you to be a pastor'. That was certainly confirmation to all that God had been telling me all of my life.

In February of 1999, the Lord led us to sell our farm in Sheridan Wyoming, and move to Buffalo Wyoming where we could be more involved with our church. Both Celeste and I felt directly impressed to ask a specific price for our farm. We called the real estate lady we had bought our farm from, and she said we'd never get that much for it. We told her that we believed that's what God wanted us to ask, and if it was God's will, He'd sell it for us. She said 'good luck'. In less than 1 week we had to cash offers for exactly what we wanted. God wanted us in Buffalo! After selling our farm in Sheridan, we had a significant amount profit from the sale, and I asked God if we could go to Bible College to get prepared for the ministry. The Lord say "No, move to Buffalo." So we moved to Buffalo, and before we even got completely un-packed, the church we had been attending had disbanded and the church was done.

We were in shock, but knew that God had brought us to Buffalo for a reason. We felt terrible for all the 'sheep' that were left without a shepherd, so we sought the Lord as to what we could do to help minister to these sheep. Celeste had been the worship leader of this ministry that just disbanded and we personally owned all the sound equipment, so we just decided to set up our sound system in our living room and begin a home fellowship.

Celeste would lead worship, and we'd order cassette tapes and listen to Pastor Wayne from Calvary Chapel Billings teach for our Sunday morning messages. We had several of his old tapes, and we decided we'd just get set up on his mailing list. We called Wayne later that week to tell him what we had in mind, and he invited us up to meet with him the next Sunday morning. We went up that Sunday and met with Pastor Wayne after church. Wayne could see the hand of God moving upon our lives, and he asked me "what do you see?" I knew what Wayne was asking me – about being a pastor, and I knew what God had called me to do, and I too could see the hand of the Lord upon our lives, but I was afraid. After all, I hadn't had all the 'formal training', and we weren't being 'sent out' in the normal church-planting fashion.

After meeting with Wayne that day, he agreed to come down on Sunday nights and teach us what he had taught his congregation that morning. So we set it up to begin the next week, and that next Sunday night, Celeste led worship, and Wayne led the Bible study. After a couple of Sundays, Wayne asked me to start a mid-week bible study. It was July, and I thought 'sure, I'll teach a bible study through the summer'. Little did I know what God had in store for me. Around August 1, 1999, I began a bible study in our living room in the book of Romans and our little ministry began to outgrow our living room, so in October of that same year, Wayne announced that the snow was soon coming and that he would no longer be able to come down to Buffalo. So Wayne asked me if I knew what 'the truth was and what I knew in my heart', and I told him I knew what God was up to, and I was surrendered to do God's will. God had spent the previous 2 years, intensively preparing me to become the pastor of Calvary Chapel Buffalo.

By October of that same year, we had out grown our living room, so Wayne and I began looking for a building to rent. We found and rented the 7th Day Adventist Church Building here in Buffalo Wyoming. Then Wayne asked God's blessing upon me and Celeste and our ministry, and from that day forward, I became the pastor of Calvary Chapel, in Buffalo Wyoming.

At the beginning of our ministry, in the summer of 1999, we filed with the FCC to acquire a Calvary Satellite Network Radio station here in Buffalo Wyoming. We desperately needed Christian radio in this region. The process was very long and trying as we began to pray for, and wait upon the Lord for our new full power CSN radio station.

In the fall of 2000, a man by the name of Bob Moore contacted me about starting an LPFM radio station. He informed us that the FCC was granting LP-FM permits in limited quantity, and we only had 2 weeks to file before the window of opportunity was over. With the help of a good attorney, and a very gifted Christian radio engineer, we filed for a LP-FM station for here in Buffalo Wyoming. Six months later, we were informed that we were granted a construction permit. Praise God! We were one of thousands that had applied. We were given 18 months to complete our station, or the permit would be void. It took us 12 months of prayer and planning to get our station on the air. Several faithful and devoted volunteers had contributed to make the station a reality. We have had several thousand dollars worth of equipment donated and several thousand dollars worth of cash donations to help get the station off the ground. On Monday, June 17th 2002 at 8 am, KSLW (Streams of Living Water), 99.5 fm 'The Stream' was born, and is now heard all over our community and globally over the World Wide Web on streaming audio!

From the fall of 2000 through the fall of 2002, things were going pretty well. We felt very blessed. Our church was growing and people's lives were being changed. We were

making an impact on our community- seeing people come to Christ and then being water baptized. Things were great, but then it seemed like everything that could go wrong did go wrong. The building that we had been meeting in was sold, and we were moved from one location to another w/in that facility until finally the rent became too expensive and we were forced to move out. We really had no place to go and at that time it was the middle of winter, maybe March of 2003. Things were beginning to unravel. People were leaving the church, some of our key financial supporters had moved, and it seems like we had been stripped down to just a handful of people once again. I can't tell you how hard that particular time in my life was. It was beyond horrible! Even the elders in our church were encouraging me and Celeste to leave Buffalo if God opened another door.

In the spring of 2004 things had become so bad that I called Wayne and told him, "We're shutting down our radio station and leaving Buffalo, it looks like God is going to move us to Calvary Chapel Cheyenne to serve there". "We've been here now over four years, and nothings' really happening." "Many of our supporters have left and all that seem to remain are detractors – I guess it's time to leave." Our plan was to shut down our radio station on that Friday night, and that Sunday we were announcing to the few folks we had at church "it's all over, we're leaving" and then on Monday we were going to have our Real Estate Agent list our house on the market...However, we weren't totally certain of what God wanted for us to do. I knew for sure that God wanted us to 'pull the plug on our radio station' (which was actually located in the basement of our home). So we did that. That Friday night at midnight we shut down KSLW and the next morning we began dismantling the tower and radio station equipment, preparing it to be sold. On that Saturday morning I felt a calming, a total peace, I felt the Lord saying 'that was all I wanted you to do for now'. So we left it at that. We didn't announce to our church that we were leaving and we didn't list our house, we just continued serving the Lord at Calvary Chapel Buffalo.

For the next month, I really struggled with why God would have us shut down our radio ministry, yet keep us in Buffalo? And then it happened on Memorial Day weekend -God revealed why He needed for us to shut down our radio station. That Saturday morning while I was at my church office studying, one of the disks in my lower back herniated...20 years earlier when I had torn all the ligaments in my lower back while dead lifting, it had come back to haunt me. That morning as I was preparing for Sunday's message, I felt something in my back 'pop'. I immediately grabbed the telephone as I fell from my office chair to the floor. I instantly knew that something was very seriously wrong with my back. I couldn't even stand up straight and I was in excruciating pain. I had Celeste haul me over to the Chiropractor's office where the Doctor worked on my back for over an hour and it didn't help, in fact it felt worse!

Sunday morning I taught while sitting on a bar stool, and by Monday morning I was in so much pain that I couldn't even get out of the tub. The doctor requested me to meet her in her office to see if she could get me anymore relief, yet I collapsed on the front porch of our home in agony. I couldn't move. I couldn't get up, I could get into our car and I couldn't even get back into bed. I had to have Celeste and our son Ryan practically carried me back into our bed as I cried in agony. The chiropractor finally ended coming over to our home and tried everything from near overdose levels of ibuprofen to acupuncture...nothing helped. After an hour or so of trying to help me, they finally called an ambulance and the paramedics came and hauled me on a stretcher out of my bed to the hospital.

When I got to the hospital (this was Memorial Day 2004), the Doctors loaded me up

with Vicoden and Valium, but neither seemed to even touch the pain I was in, until they slowly increased the dose and I fell asleep. Because we live in such a small community here in Wyoming, our hospital does not have an MRI unit. We depend upon a mobile unit that travels around the state of Wyoming serving small communities like ours. As the Lord had already arranged it, the mobile MRI unit was in Buffalo at 9 am that next morning and I was the 1<sup>st</sup> one in it. They diagnosed me with a herniated disc and immediately scheduled me for emergency surgery with a back surgeon 40 miles away in Sheridan Wyoming. They loaded me up with medication for the ride and then sent me and Celeste off to the Sheridan hospital for my back surgery. Within minutes of arriving at the hospital, I was in surgery, and within a few hours I was in my hospital room recovering. I remember that afternoon when I woke up I needed to use the restroom, but as I began to walk towards the bathroom, my left foot would not function correctly...some nerves in my left leg had been permanently damaged, and I now had a condition called 'drop foot'. I would never walk the same way again; I would never run again, I would never be the same healthy-athletic person I had been. My life had been forever changed.

That afternoon, they sent me home with a two week period of bed rest. I was to lay low and recover on my bed. As I lie there in bed, I began to evaluate ministry. You know how Satan is, he's more than happy to show up and put doubt in our minds – "is God really for you?" "How could this be God's will for your life?" "Why don't you just quit the ministry and go back to the automotive industry?!" Tough, depressing and very discouraging thoughts. As I lay there in my bed and I began to take stock of my life, and I began to hear the devil say "Is it really worth serving God? – look at your life! Several years ago you had your health, you had your finances, you were well liked, but now you're just a loser!" You know how wonderful our Lord is, and His timing is so perfect...that very afternoon as I was lying in bed listening to another Christian radio station, a Presbyterian pastor preached a message titled "Is it really worth serving God", and he used the text from Psalm 73. It's the text of Asaph, David's worship leader who began questioning his own life – "Is it worth serving God?" Asaph began to look at the people of the world and how they always seemed to be so well liked, and so well off. They rarely ever seem to go through hard times and when they die, their lives are so celebrated, and yet in his life he was trying to live for God but he was so discouraged. Asaph began to consider-"is it really worth serving God"? He said that he almost fell, and then the Lord showed him the end of the life of the unbeliever, that he is doomed to eternal damnation. It was then at that moment that Asaph declared, "Yes! It is worth serving God, and serving Him well!"

The Lord renewed my strength from that message! After my mandatory two weeks bed rest was up, I knew that I needed to go find a second job in addition to the ministry to try to pay for all my newly acquired medical bills. It was during that time in our ministry that was so unbelievably difficult. I don't think that we were hardly able to take any pay, the church was six months behind on our utility bills, we had to pay our mortgage on our credit card, and we had absolutely no medical insurance of any kind. Times were so tough at that point in our ministry that we had people dropping food off on our front door step. We had a couple of brothers from another ministry in Gillette that one Saturday morning loaded up his trunk with groceries and came over and filled our kitchen pantry. This was really a hard, humbling time of God's testing us to see if we would remain faithful. I think the lowest point of that season came one morning when we got out of bed and our daughter Bethany had poured herself a bowl of cereal and we were out of milk. To her it was no big deal- just run

off to the store and buy another gallon of milk. To us it was a very big deal—we didn't even have \$2.50 to go to the grocery store to buy her milk... "Do you still trust me Peter, the Lord would say?" That was so hard, it broke my heart! I desperately pleaded with God to 'release us from Buffalo'. I was a trained automotive technician, I was capable (and even offered) a six-figure income in Denver Colorado! But here I was in Buffalo Wyoming; my back was a mess, our finances were destroyed, my health was gone, our church had shrunk and the only people who seemed to be saying anything about me, were my detractors. I began to feel a little bit like Job, though I know I didn't experience quite what he did, although because of the overwhelming stress in my life at that point, my body actually did break out with little red spots all over. At one point I thought to myself, "All I need now is a broken piece of pottery to scrape off all my sores."

In spite of all of this, I still trusted the Lord. I wasn't going to quit, I wasn't going to give up, I wasn't going to turn to the left or the right, and I wasn't going to turn back. It was at this time of my life that I adopted Job's statement – "though the Lord slay me, yet will I trust Him!" How often I thought to myself, "Lord, You have the very words of life, where else can I go?" "If these trials take my very life, then I want to die trusting You."

After being released from bed rest from my doctor I began to look for work in Buffalo. I ended up landing a job at a local screen print shop on the graveyard shift – 10 pm to 6 am; Sunday-Thursday. I thought "this is perfect and will work perfectly with all my ministry requirements, besides; all I'd be doing at that time of the night is sleeping anyways!" I continued to teach three times a week and after every Sunday and Wednesday night service, I'd run off to fulfill my graveyard shift.

I worked this shift with one other man who happened to be a Mormon. He worked in the main part of the warehouse, and I worked in the 'dark room', printing silk screens for t-shirts. For the first couple months, the job seemed to go ok, but as you can imagine, I really didn't make that much money and as a result, all of my creditors including the Hospital, anesthesiologist, and surgeons office began calling and threatening to bring me to collections. I tried making arrangements, but two of my credit card companies took me to court and sued me to have my wages garnished. I remember that day as I drove to court, exhausted from my schedule, and quite honestly, my life. I was fearful of having my name put in the local newspaper. I was doing everything that I could. I drove a \$500 car, most of our furniture had been donated to us, I had old clothes, and we lived in a thousand square foot home. We lived as absolutely modestly as we could, and yet we still weren't making it. I'm working two full time jobs, I have six years of professional education and twenty years of experience, and now it all comes down to this – I'm being sued by a credit card company for a few thousand dollars.

I wasn't worried about me, I was grief stricken over the possibility that I could misrepresent my Lord in this little community. I felt like a caged rat, or a lamb being led to slaughter as I drove to the courthouse to have my creditors file charges against me. Do you know how low we can feel as humans? It's that awful sensation where life just simple sucks the breath right out of your body, and I was there. For the first time in my life, I began to seriously consider suicide...but thought, "I'm a pastor and I'm in God's will! Why am I here?! Why am I going through this?!" "Lord I've tried so hard to obey You and live surrendered to Your will, and now it's all about to come crumbling down." To others looking at my life, they obviously knew that I had sinned against the Lord and as a result, I was fully receiving the punishment that I was owed. (Isn't it amazing how many of Job's friends

show up, when you are going through trials that nearly cost you your very life? Somebody has once accurately stated, "only Christians shoot their wounded.") I had no answer for my own justification as to why I had to go through this. I had only two choices; I could run or I could continue to trust the Lord. I had no other options. By God's grace, He enabled me to trust Him, "though He slay me, yet will I trust Him"...

That same night as I worked my grave yard shift in the 'dark room', the devil began to taunt me. He stood there in that dark room with me at 2 am and said "You're such a looser! You're wife and kids are home in bed, you've lost your finances, people hate you and you've lost your health!" How could I respond? I couldn't, I was guilty as charged. Every step I took that night I was tripping over my left foot because of my 'drop foot' condition. I hung my head and began to cry...it was then that the Holy Spirit spoke to my heart, and He said "Peter, you are as Joseph in Potiphar's prison. So I began to mediate on that statement...what does the Lord mean by that? Well, for one thing I knew that Joseph was not imprisoned because of a sin that he had committed, in fact he'd actually been imprisoned and falsely accused because he had actually done the right thing in running away from Potiphar's wife when she tried to seduce him. I also knew that God had a purpose for Joseph's imprisonment, just as He had a purpose for my imprisonment. Thirdly, I began to think about how and when Joseph was released- it was the chief butler and his recollection of Joseph's ability to interpret dreams. So I told the Lord that night, "Lord, I know that I won't be released from this prison until You put my name upon the king's lips"

In a matter of minutes, the Holy Spirit fell upon me in the middle of that 'dark room', and I stood there weeping. I felt so weak that I couldn't move. In fact I couldn't do anything as I stood there with the Lord speaking to my heart. After a few minutes the presence of God let up just enough for me to go back to work, and then again, over at my work station the Holy Spirit just fell upon me and I began to weep profusely. As I stood there I thought, 'I need to go somewhere private where this other man wouldn't be able to walk in and see me weeping- he was a Mormon, he wouldn't understand.' So I left the 'dark room' and I went up front lobby and went into the men's restroom, went into one of the stalls and then I shut and locked the door, and I sat down and let it all out. As I sat there in that men's restroom, weeping before the Lord, I began to watch a puddle of tears collect on the floor. As I sat there talking with the Lord, He asked me a very important question; He said "Peter, do you believe that I am able to put a million dollars in your bank account over night?" and I said "Yes Lord, I know that you are able to do that." And then the Lord asked me another very vital question- He said, "Peter, what would you have Me to do-deposit one million dollars in your bank account over night, or break you and make you usable?" I said, "Lord, I don't care if I go another million dollars in debt, break me and make me usable." Then the Lord spoke one more time to my heart, and He said, "Before the sunrises you will be broken and I will release you from prison." I got up, went back to work and that morning at about 6 am, as I walked out the door of that big steel building, I saw the sun rising, and I heard the voice of the Lord say "Your chains are broken, you are free!"

Hallelujah!!! The sky was blue again, the grass was green, and I was filled with God's supernatural peace, the peace that God always gives when He ends our trials!!! I'd been set free, Jesus Christ had put my name upon the king's lips, and I had been set free! I was broken, I was changed, I was finally useable by the Lord as He had thoroughly humbled me. I will never be the same; ever again, I am a new creation in Christ Jesus!

That same fall, Celeste and I went to a 'Straight Up Conference' at Harvest Meadows Bible Chapel with Pastor James McDonald. It was an incredible conference and God did another great work in my life! I went to the conference with the assumption that everything was ok in my life, that I was completely right with God and nothing in my life needed to be addressed...but I was completely wrong. All those years of pain and suffering had caused some horrible baggage; in fact, it had caused a 'root of bitterness' to set into my heart. I had somehow allowed the seeds of frustration to settle into my heart, and they ended up causing me to be bitter, of all things towards God and I didn't even know it until God revealed it to me!

I was devastated! Up until that point I had been envisioning myself as standing with my hand on the door of our sanctuary, ready to walk out the door unless God did a great work to confirm that I was supposed to be in Buffalo. As I sat there in the sanctuary of Harvest Bible chapel, the Lord spoke to my heart about that vision, and said "Look down at your hand", and so I did, and as I looked down, I realized that I was standing on the outside of the sanctuary, holding the outside of the door knob. Then the Lord spoke to my heart and said, "Peter, you're not really even committed to My calling upon your life to these people in Buffalo." I was heartbroken! I had never realized that a root of bitterness had set into my heart that had kept me from being committed to my calling as the Pastor of Calvary Chapel Buffalo. Without realizing it, little thoughts like 'Why doesn't God add to this ministry', 'where are all the people?', 'I'm so faithful', why doesn't this church grow?' In not rebuking these thoughts as the fiery darts of the enemy, they had lodged in my heart and defiled me with a root of bitterness. So I began crying out to the Lord for the gift of repentance. I begged Him that night as we all prepared for communion and the end of the conference was coming to a close. I cried out as James was preaching "Lord if you will grant to me the genuine gift of repentance, I will go back to Buffalo and commit myself to those people and that community, even if it means that I have to by a grave site." After James' McDonald's message, he gave an invitation for repentance to come forward to the altar – I went forward and knelt down before the Lord and everyone in the entire church and cried out to God for forgiveness, and He granted it to me!!!!

After the altar call, I went back to my seat with the joy of the Lord flooding my heart! I had not been that joyous for nearly 40 years – the night Jesus Christ came into my life as my personal Lord and Savior! I love Him, I love Him, I love Him!!!

As the conference ended Celeste and I walked out into the cool Chicago night, and I looked up into the heavens as saw the billions of stars twinkling in the night sky, and the Lord said to me, "Peter, before I could build the ministry, I have to build the congregation, and before I can build the congregation, I had to build the man! And you are the man that I have called to preach My Word there in Buffalo Wyoming." I was elated! God had truly granted me the gift of repentance; He had ripped out by the root, that root of bitterness that would have quickly defiled me.

That night Celeste and I went back to our hotel room and I was nearly floating off the ground I was so filled with joy! I fell asleep with a giant smile on my face and I slept the entire night through with a smile on my face, and then around 6 am, the Holy Spirit woke me up and said 'come spend some time with me before your wife wakes up', and I said with joy and submission, 'Lord how about in a little while?' and the Lord, as precious as He is said (almost as though I could feel His smile) "come away with me my beloved!" So I got up out of bed, took my bible and daily devotional which was from 1 Peter 5:1-4, and I read:

The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

After reading that, the Lord spoke to my heart, "Peter, I am giving you a fresh charge to go back to Buffalo Wyoming and 'Preach My Word', not for financial gain, but out of love, and when I return, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

Hallelujah!!! Nothing could be better than a fresh and personal charge from the Lord Jesus to return to Buffalo and preach His precious Word! What a God, what a King!

Well, for the next 2 years our church began meeting on Saturday nights at the local Assemblies of God church building. They were in the process of building a new facility, and our intention was to purchase their old building as soon as they moved out. After a little over 3 years the AG church finished their building, moved out and we purchased their old building on Hart street. That, in and of itself was nothing short of a miracle! Just exactly the right amount of money at just exactly the right time, God provided our very own 1<sup>st</sup> church building when just a few years earlier; I couldn't even afford to buy groceries. Isn't He faithful! Nothing is too hard for our God!

In March of 2008 we began meeting in our own building on Sunday mornings and we really began to grow again. We grew so much that we quickly out grew that facility. We ended up running out of room in our nursery, and we almost immediately ran out of room for all our Sunday school classes. In fact one of our classes ended up having to meet outside in a playhouse, and then we ended up bringing in a mobile office which we parked in the church parking lot to use as another class room. God had grown us out of our facility, and it was a good problem! Our finances were growing, and I think that even some of my detractors had died! (Or at least they'd moved). Somebody once said, "The best way to deal with your detractors is to outlive them" – not necessarily in life span, but in the quality of our lives! And God was causing me to 'outlive my detractors'. It really is true, God's hand does rest on the thermostat, and once our trial has ended, He turns off the oven!

I remember many years ago at a Calvary Chapel Senior Pastor's conference that I was talking with one of Pastors who'd been in the ministry for a lot of years, and I asked him, "how do you successfully get through a trial without quitting?" He gave me some of the wisest advice I've ever heard, and he said "Pete, God is doing greater things through lesser people than you." "When we go through a trial, we think that there are only 2 options: Quit, or grow bitter; but he said, "there is a third option, and that is to remember that God is sovereign, and one day God will begin blessing your ministry and you won't be doing anything any differently, it's just God's time." I could say now, that "this was God's time for our ministry to grow!"

So- we'd out grown the building we'd just bought, in less than 6 months, great! Now what? Well, i don't believe in burdening God's people with financial debt, so we began to pray. I didn't really even say anything to anyone, I just began to pray. In the meantime, the Wesleyan church held an auction for the sale of their entire facility. They were in the process of building a brand new church facility and they had had their old facility on the

market for quite a while without any luck selling it, so they decided to auction it and the church parsonage off in this auction. Well, as God worked it all out, one of the couples in our church are real-estate investors and they had gone to the auction to bid on the church parsonage, but when the bidding on it went above their price, they decided to hang out until the end of the auction, so they could get their deposit back. As they waited, the auctioneer began to auction off the rest of the church property, and to their amazement, it was going for less than the price of the church parsonage, and at the last minute, they bid on it and won the entire church facility! Immediately after leaving the auction, they came straight to my office and said, "Pete, does Calvary need a new facility, we just bought the entire Wesleyan church property on DeSmet Ave, less the parsonage!" Obviously I was overjoyed, and said "Yes! We've been praying, asking God what to do, since we've been so short of room in our Hart street location – praise God!!!!"

For the next year and a half, the Wesleyan church leased back that property from the new owners, and we waited to move in. As is true with any building project, it nearly always costs much more than expected and takes twice as much time. Such was the case with the Wesleyan folks as they patiently waited for their contractors to finish their new facility. Well, eventually that day did come in December of 2009 and they moved out of their old facility and into their new facility the week before Christmas in 2009. As the Wesleyan were preparing to move out, the new owners were questioning us, if we were ready to take possession...remember now, the economy has crashed, things have slowed down, and nobody is lending to churches... especially for a double mortgage. The new owners were offering Calvary Chapel Buffalo this new facility free of charge with only a minimal interest payment of December 2010! The only problem was we'd have two facilities, and then the responsibility to sell off our Hart street location! Who wants to buy a church in Buffalo Wyoming in 2010?? We already have approximately 20 churches w/ 3900 people in our community, who needs another church to start up?

Well, the time came (one week before Christmas) where I had to make the decision whether or not to go ahead and move into this new facility (and trust the Lord to not only provide the finances, but also to sell our old building), or stay put while the new owners winterized the DeSmet facility after the Wesleyans moved out. So I began to pray, and I told the Lord that I didn't want to commit the sin of presumption by moving into this new facility ahead of His will, and neither did I want to draw back in lack of faith. So I asked God for the gift of faith, a measure of faith needed to move forward and confirm that this was His will, and that is exactly what He did! The Lord filled my heart with faith, and we gave the go-ahead that we would buy this new facility and move in no later than January 1, 2010. So that's what we did, we moved in by faith, and now we had two facilities.

One of the other requirements, strangely enough, was that we needed to acquire a 'special use permit' from the city of Buffalo in order to legally use this new property as a church. So in order to keep things simple, we waited to move our radio station over from the Hart street address until we had secured our special use permit on the DeSmet property. After the city council met, we were approved and a week later, we moved our radio station to our new location on DeSmet Ave. That same week, God brought along a buyer for our old church building on Hart Street and within 30 days we closed on both properties! Isn't He wonderful?! God is so good! And why do we so often doubt Him and His ability to provide? 'Prone to wander, prone to leave the God I love!' We shouldn't doubt, but we still do, yet He is always faithful!

Well here we are, October 1, 2010, what will the Lord do next?! I can hardly wait! Whatever I do, I love ventures of faith! May it never be said of me, "God could have done great things had he truly trusted in the God who saved his soul!"

If God has chosen to do all this through me, it proves that He can do anything through anybody who is willing to submit to His will, trust Him and patiently follow Him every step of the way! He is great and He is awesome! What kinds of things do you suppose He wants to do in you? Be encouraged, if you'll open your heart to Him, He'll do great and mighty things that you know not! May you be blessed in name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and if my testimony has been an encouragement to you, please drop me an email, I'd love to hear from you!

All this for my King!

Pastor Pete