

A photograph of a winding asphalt road through a dense forest. The road is wet and has double yellow lines. The trees are tall and green, with a thick mist or fog hanging in the air, creating a somber and atmospheric scene. The lighting is soft and diffused, typical of an overcast day in a wooded area.

JOURNEY OF BROKENNESS HEALING AND RESOTARTION

DR. T.A. POWELL

Acknowledgement

In the journey of life, the Lord is gracious in providing ways in which you cross paths with people who bless you and many times speak into your life. One such person in my life is Rianna Wilson. We met Rianna as a smiling, gracious barista at the Joe Bean's Express Espresso in Lynchburg, Virginia.

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Last, but most importantly, my bride, Betty who is always speaking into my life the wisdom that can only come from God.

I am a blessed man....

My Journey of Brokenness, Healing and Restoration

By T.A. Powell

Well, there it was. The bomb had dropped, and I sat in a room of the people I loved the most who now trusted me the least. If you told me on that dark, dismal Saturday night that today, my family would be closer than ever, that my wife would not only still be by my side but that our love would be deeper and stronger than I thought possible, that God would use my bad decisions as the foundation of my life's work, I'd tell you, you were crazy.

Let me start at the beginning. During the year, 2003, my life was radically changed. It was a year beginning with outward celebrations but the inward turmoil of my life was reaching a breaking point. There were highs and lows during the course of that year. In February Betty and I celebrated our 25th anniversary of being at the church where I was pastor. In May I finished my Masters Degree at Liberty University and graduated with honors. Many would say we were living a happy fulfilled life. I had a loving, dedicated, faithful wife, three wonderful grown children all married to spouses who served the Lord in our church, precious grandchildren and for the first time in our lives we were enjoying financial freedom.

Still on the inside there was a raging battle of temptation and discouragement. I was dealing with a very divisive staff member in the church who was sowing seeds of discord. By his own admission he hated me with a passion. Clever as he was he never displayed that attitude publicly. I tried frantically to bring some conclusion to our relationship, but he refused. Finally, I mustered up the courage to fire him. He acted with extreme hostility. He left, taking a group of people whom he had quietly influenced.

Being careful not to show my hurt I looked happy on the outside but I was extremely distraught on the inside. My feelings were that I had given my life, 25 years to this ministry and it seemed as though God kept saying "no" to me and would not allow it to prosper beyond what I felt it should have. Those "I don't care anymore" feelings gripped my soul and it was at this time I became even more vulnerable: I let my guard down and Satan blind-sided me. During that time it was the care, concern and sympathy of a secretary that created in me a spiritual vacuum, a compartment, a permission to sin and I did. That which I had feared all of my life and ministry swallowed me. I made the most destructive decision of my entire life. The sinkhole was created and Satan had obtained the victory. I reached the bottom of the slippery slope and fell morally. It seemed like it was all over. For seven months it gnawed at my soul, I was heavy with conviction and I knew that I would reap what I had sown and I was scared to death. I had betrayed my God, my family, my church and my friends and I knew that it was only a matter of time before the end would come.

My daughters had become very suspicious of some of my actions during that seven month period and knew that something was wrong. My wife never had a clue until I admitted it to her on Saturday morning January 3, 2004. Needless to say, she broke down in disbelief and shock. My actions literally tore out her heart, but beyond her broken heart she loved me unconditionally.

That Saturday night I called a special deacon's meeting and admitted to them my sin and told them that I was going before the church the next morning and confess to them. They were broken-hearted and many wept openly. They asked me to wait and go before the church on Sunday night rather than Sunday morning. I consented but did not preach on that morning or attend church. That Saturday night my grown children stayed with me all night long. Of course we did not sleep very much. It was a long, heavy occasion but they constantly assured me of their devotion and love. Then, Sunday night I went to the church, confessed my wrong doing and openly repented of my sin. In the beginning the church embraced us in love and forgiveness. Later it turned to anger and revenge. It was the worst situation of my whole life. I feel the pain even as I reflect back on it now. It is not easy to write about it. I felt that it would have been better if I were dead. I had caused extreme heartache. I was the man who had previously said, "That will never happen to me." But it did.

The next day, Sunday afternoon, before I went before the church, my friend Dr. Johnny Hunt, who pastors the First Baptist Church of Woodstock, Georgia called me and encouraged me to come to Woodstock and rest and in the process to enter the City of Refuge, a ministry of their church which ministers in a professional way, to pastors and full time Christian servants when they have been involved in forced terminations, burnout, immorality and other family issues. I consented and within a week we were in Woodstock. My life, my dreams, my plans were no more. I was a broken world person. I didn't think that I would ever laugh again. The personal pain and the pain that I had caused to those whom I loved the most was almost unbearable. I had become a forced out statistic through my own choices.

My recovery began after Dr. Johnny Hunt invited me to Woodstock, Georgia. Within a week of my public confession and repentance we were in Woodstock and committed our lives in trust to the City of Refuge. The church provided us a little two bedroom condo located in a rural area of Northwest Atlanta called Waleska. It was situated in a gated community up in the mountains on a golf course forty minutes from the church in Woodstock. My heart was so empty as Tom our son and Sharon our youngest daughter who traveled with us helped us unload the car. We arrived there early on Saturday evening. I remember how responsible and sad I felt for ripping our family apart. Previously, we were living in our dream home with Tom and his family next door, Beth, our older daughter, with her family living behind us and Sharon, our youngest daughter living just a few miles away. We now were six hundred miles away from kids, grandkids and our familiar, comfortable world.

I was broken, lonely, and fearful of what to expect next. I never will forget the tears that flowed down Tom's face as he and Sharon left us there heading back home.

Betty and I were there alone, no family, no familiar friends, just us. I could hardly look at her because of the guilt and shame I felt. I had been responsible for literally ripping her heart out and now in desperation we had to pick up all the broken pieces or either call it quits. Everything was so hard to deal with. Having lost my integrity and credibility trust in me wasn't worth two cents. I wanted to be like the little child who closes his eyes and says, "You can't see me now." I just wanted to hide. It was so painful that a heart attack and death would have been a welcomed event.

We lived in that little condo for a year and a half recovering daily from the greatest adversity of our lives. Each day I would walk up and down the mountainous golf cart paths crying out to God for His mercy and help. Most of the time I put a DVD head set on and played the song with the words, "So breathe in me, I need you now. I never felt so dead within. So breathe in me maybe somehow you could breathe new life in me again. I used to be so sensitive to the light that leads to where you are. Now I've acquired these callouses with the darkness of a cold and jaded heart. So breathe in me I need you now."

Some days as I walked up and down those paths I needed to get my mind temporarily off the situation so I would stray into the woods and pick up lost golf balls. During that year and a half I picked up over 2000 golf balls. Many of them were stamped with corporate images of some of the largest corporations in America. I have them to this day in a golf ball rack in our den. I never gaze at them without thinking of those painful days. At that time I didn't think that I would ever laugh again.

A few days after arriving we found ourselves sitting in an office waiting to be introduced to professional Christian counselors who would be responsible for our recovery. I held Betty's hand but felt she was very suspicious of my affection toward her. I felt as though I was a real loser.

During this time I was thinking that the Lord must be really grieved with me. How could I have transgressed in such an awful way? I knew better. However, the Lord showed us His marvelous grace. He loved us. The congregation at First Woodstock loved on us as did Dr. Johnny Hunt, Troy Haas, James Eubanks, Virginia Stephens and Janet Heeter. They loved us unconditionally. We were in a safe environment of grace which quite frankly we had never experienced. We shall forever be grateful.

During those ensuing months Betty and I were counseled individually to begin with and later on together. On many occasions we were so exhausted after the counseling sessions we had to go home and take a nap. We were assigned many books to read in addition to the counseling. I did not work during that time. Betty and I were together pretty much 24/7. The church

services were so powerful and inspiring at First Woodstock. They allowed me no ministry involvement during that time because among other things I was physically, emotionally and spiritually exhausted. Betty would weep during most of the services which made me very uncomfortable. I later found out that she was weeping for me. She had set her own heartache aside and was feeling so bad that I now had been stripped of what I so loved to do and that was to be a pastor and preach every Sunday. For over 30 years on every Sunday, other than when I was on vacation, I would go to the pulpit and preach God's Word. Now, I would sit while someone else preached.

My life and marriage was transformed during those months at Woodstock. Deep down in my life existed habits, fears, problems, attitudes, baggage, and sins that had never been dealt with. I was a time bomb ready to explode and it did. I had carried hurts, injustices, loneliness, and secrets for years. I had no personal accountability to anyone to discuss my hurts and other issues that were in my heart. As a senior pastor I had no mentor to explain and discuss my feelings of failure and defeats as well as the dangers of success. As a pastor I was caught up in a performance based, man pleasing co-dependent, legalistic ministry. I possessed no margin or boundaries in my life. I loved to be needed and affirmed by men and possessed a great deal of false pride. I later realized that I loved the ministry so much that it had become an idol in my life. I loved the ministry more than I loved God. I had never allowed myself to grieve about anything or to truly get in touch with my personal feelings. It was through days and weeks of personal counseling that all of these things became evident in my life and I have been able to deal with them one by one. In addition I sat weekly with other men of God who had experienced some of the same sinkholes in life that helped me to become real and authentic.

The dedication of the City of Refuge staff is unbelievable in helping full time Christian servants gain spiritual and emotional health. Week by week, James Eubanks, my personal counselor, dug deep into my life and began to pull out all that emotional baggage that I had carried from a child and during 30 years of ministry. I realized that I was a product of my nature (Adam) and my nurture (family of origin) as well as my hidden sins and temptations. My issues were man pleasing, lack of communication, no authentic accountability, secret unresolved sins, and failure to deal with conflict, being a controller and trying to build God's Kingdom for my glory rather than God's glory. We worked through all of that and I slowly began to see the light of becoming real and authentic.

After months of counseling, love, grace, provision and a very few special friends who never gave up on us and loved us unconditionally, we completed our counseling. When James Eubanks stated in his office in April 2005 that he believed that we were on the road to a solid restoration we could not help but to give praise to the Lord who knew all about us from the beginning and no doubt allowed a tragedy to come so that HE could re-make us into some vessel

that could be useable for His glory. In May 2005, Dr. Johnny Hunt presented to me on a Sunday morning service at First Baptist Church Woodstock the diploma of completion from the City of Refuge. Our whole family was present. A chapter in our life was closing and a new one was beginning.

My feelings are of freedom in Christ, renewed love for my God, open availability to Him and an eagerness to feel emotions of love, grief, forgiveness and to experience true humility. My whole family has been affected by this episode in life. My brokenness wasn't mine alone to bear. My wife and my children broke for me and with me, and each of them grieved differently and learned different lessons from this time in our lives. But this isn't world history, written by one victorious person from one perspective. I'll let them tell you themselves how God took the pieces to our lives and put them back together in a more beautiful way than we could have ever imagined.

My Dear Wife, Betty says....

When you love someone with all your heart and have committed your life to him and his dreams in life, when everything you do revolves around him, when he is the one you most want to be with, to talk to share your joys and sorrows with, betrays you....it is nothing short of total devastation to your life. There is no way to really describe the pain that is felt when you have been so blind-sided.

My husband of 35 years admitted to having an affair with someone I loved like a part of our family, and my life came to a jolting stop! It was like he kicked me as hard as he could in the deepest pit of my stomach, my legs became numb, my breath was taken away, I felt nauseous, faint and emotionally spent all at the same time. My brain was spinning, was this really happening to my marriage, my sweet family, our legacy? You never forget the day, the place, or the time you receive information you wished you had never heard.

The days that followed were even worse than I could have imagined. That was when the church family heard the shocking news from my husband. I also realized our close knit family was hurt deeply. Everything we had worked for in this church for the last 25 years was gone in an instant.

Just a few days later the children, their spouses and grand children and my husband and I are standing in a circle in the yard saying goodbye to each other. We prayed, I don't remember what was said, but I do remember there was a heavy feeling of sadness all around us. T.A. and I were on our way to Atlanta, leaving behind our sweet, but distraught family for the first time in our lives. Two of our children would drive behind us to make sure we arrived safe and



T.A. & Betty

sound, then they left us....I will never forget that departure. I felt so alone.

The children were left behind to “weather the storm.” And it was just that. The church was so angry with my husband's infidelity that they could not or would not minister to our children. They stayed in the church for a few weeks. All three of them had grown up in this church family, they didn't know where else to go or what else to do with the pain they had.

Over the next months, we were loved on by the folks at First Baptist. The grace this church administered to us was a healing balm to our souls. The church we had ministered to, worked and sacrificed for over 25 years had turned their backs on us. They were busy trying to inflict pain on my husband. I realize now; they were hurting also. The church needed someone to come to them and help them through the pain and betrayal they felt, but unfortunately, they did not seek that.

We became full-time counselees in the City Of Refuge program the church offered to us. Three times a week, we would go in for intense counseling. The church paid for our housing and asked us not to work for three months. God so blessed us that we did not work for over a year while there. Life for us was a huge roller coaster as we dealt with all the emotions. This was not an easy effort; it took work and a lot of time. Sometimes, we were so exhausted after counseling, we would have to come home and take a nap. I honestly believe that had we not received the counseling we did, our marriage would not have made it or, had we stayed together without counseling, our marriage would have only existed as cohabitation.

These wonderful folks also brought all our children and their spouses and grandchildren to Atlanta and we had family sessions. They even provided babysitters! The love we felt while there was amazing. Pastors and their families often give and give to a congregation who take and take. This time in Atlanta was a well of refreshment to all of us.

Seven years have now passed, and the journey has been an amazing one. I could write a book on what God has done in our lives since those dark, painful days. I can remember when we would go to church, I would feel pain as I knew T.A. was sitting in the pew with me for the first time in our married life, and not in the pulpit where he had been called to serve; the grief we felt when going to see the children in the place we once called home or the uncomfortable feeling of running into someone we knew not knowing how they were going to react to us. But God has healed all of that!

The growth for both of us has been significant, but T.A. has gone through a metamorphosis. He has learned so much about a close relationship with God, about being emotionally healthy and about loving completely. He has taken the foundation he received in Atlanta and added to it a library of wisdom in the books he has applied to his life. We both live in the freedom we know God has given us. We have seen restoration of our marriage and life ministries. We have the joy in our marriage today that only Christ's healing can give.

Yes, as you have read, the pain was awful, the betrayal hurtful and the losses were great, but the healing has brought about great peace. I believe deep intimacy with God can only come through trials and sufferings. Brokenness is not a word to fear, because when we are forced to empty ourselves of hurt, pride and control, it is then that we can rely on God to fill us with his love, patience and forgiveness. I knew God had done a work in my heart when I was able to sit in front of the woman who had the affair with my husband, hold her hand, pray with her and forgive her! I could not nor would not have done that on my own. For the first time I truly understood what it meant to trust Christ with my life.

Our family has learned to tap into the inner strength that God enabled in each of us. We have learned much about life, people, love and brokenness. We learned the freedom and power of forgiveness. Forgiveness is a process, not amnesia; it is acceptance, not approval of what has been done. I just want to say, God has blessed us! The blessings came through many tears, but God knew. He had a plan for me and my wonderful husband. I never want to go back to the place I was before He allowed the heartache in my life. I handed Him ashes and He transformed them into beauty.

I have learned the healing power of God's word. I cannot tell you how precious my Bible is to me. While in Woodstock, I would mark certain verses and promises and claim them. There were times then that I would look at those words and hang on by a single thin thread. Today, when I come across one of those marked up passages, I thank God over and over again and there is a sweet peace that comes over me, knowing that my healing has come from His precious word and loving hand.

Our family is a true example of what can happen to a life shattered into little pieces and put back together piece by piece by a loving Father. "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." And indeed He did!

My Son Tom says....

I was on my way home just days after Christmas with my wife and three small children. We were visiting my in-laws who live in the northern part of the country, about 700 miles away from home. With five hours still to go my sister Beth called me and told me with tears and anger that dad had an affair.



Tom, Wendy, Julia, Tré, Jack & Jude

I knew this because in September, just four months earlier, I visited my dad

at his office in our church where we were all very active. Dad always had an “open door policy.” I felt comfortable walking in at anytime and saying hello and joking around with him. This particular time, I felt uneasy because his secretary was coming out of his office and walked right by me without saying anything. That was unusual because we were all very close friends. When I left the office, I returned to my vehicle where my wife and kids were, and I told my wife that my dad is having an affair. She dismissed the idea. I told her what happened, but it still sounded so unbelievable.

I can say that when I heard the news confirmed, I was not shocked. I hung up the phone and told my wife what happened followed by a quick “I told you so.” We chatted for a few moments and made comments about how stupid it was, but the remainder of the trip was quiet.

This situation separated my entire family. We all lived as close as next door neighbors. We all were very active in church. We hung out some nights, some weekends, and many times during the day.

The hardest thing I've ever done is take my mom and dad to Atlanta where they were seeking counseling immediately after the affair was no longer a secret. It was reminiscent of being dropped off for college, except this time I was doing the dropping off. It was only a few short days after the affair was revealed, and while I was dropping them off, I think it finally hit me what was really happening. I was at a place that I was uncertain about how to act or respond. It was the only time I wept for my mom and dad. I wanted them to work through this, and I knew they could. I just felt awful about them having to go through these difficult steps to get to eventual healing. By God's grace healing came and it's still going on.

My immediate family was not as affected because the kids were so young that they did not even know what was going on. It made my wife and me closer, and we vowed transparency in our marriage so that this issue would not creep up on us.

At first, we all continued going to the same church. After all, this was my church for 26 years, and at age 33 with a small family, I had built many friendships and relationships that I was comfortable with at my church. It only took about three weeks to realize that continuing to attend the church made it more difficult for my family. We began to feel the blame for what had happened. We left the church, and began to be very complacent about church as a whole.

The only memory of anyone ministering to our hurts was a local pastor, Dr. John Kimball, who invited me and my two sisters along with our spouses to discuss and try to make some sense out of the situation. At that time, it was still too fresh for us to really open up. Although we did not share much with Dr. Kimball, we knew he loved us and we all appreciated his effort to reach out; he was the only one who did.

After Dad and Mom left I had to develop my own convictions as an adult,

married man. This usually happens at 18 when kids leave home and begin a life of their own. Because I was so close physically to my dad and mom, I never had the opportunity to be a man of my own. I was under their umbrella. I always responded to conviction with “what would dad say” or “how will this affect my dad at church.”

It took about 18 months to work out my salvation, but I'm on the winning side. Today, even though my dad lives four hours away, I feel closer to him than ever. Maybe it's email; maybe its cell phone; maybe its text messaging. Who really knows? I'd like to believe that it is because I have a true human respect for him, not as a pastor on a pedestal, but as my dad. I have completely recovered and am a stronger man because of dad's journey of restoration. My faith is stronger. My convictions are stronger and they are my own. My relationship with my current church is stronger.

I have no bitter feelings toward anyone, nor do I have un-forgiveness toward anyone who I felt treated us badly and unfairly. I have moved on and life is much better.

My Daughter Beth says....

Sitting in my living room after I had learned about the devastation in our family, I believed I had literally lost everything. Our lives from this day forth would never be the same. We were completely engulfed in the ministry of that church and in that perspective, we truly had lost everything. Outside of the normalcy of my husband, my two children and I, from here on our life as we knew it would change completely. Betrayal was not a feeling that I had from my father-it was the feeling I had from the church ministry. There was no chance at the beginning to deal with the betrayal of my father because of the extreme hurt that came from the people inside the four walls of that ministry.

Of course, there were very difficult days, and some days you didn't feel like you could even get out of the bed, but I knew God would not allow this suffering without a great purpose for us. When you have children, everything has to be as normal as possible, so we did the best we could to hide the hurt and pain.

I know that our family became stronger through this. Dad was always absorbed by the church and its needs and although he would be at family gatherings, his mind would be on the church and his people. We now have all of dad at family gatherings and functions. His life is still busy, but we really are his first priority now. I began to pray very hard for God to show us what to do



Beth, David, Allison & Travis

and what church to worship and what school for my children to attend.

I know this was not God's perfect plan for my dad, but He allowed this to work His perfect plan in my life and the life of my siblings. Seven years later...God is so good! I have been able to see His plan unfolding and it is so INCREDIBLE. It is far more than I would have ever dreamed that He could do with my family. I look back in my journal occasionally to see what God has done in our lives. Nothing could compare!

It took about two years for me to get over the hurt feelings from the people who I felt treated us wrongly. I feel as if I have completely recovered from this chapter in our lives and what an incredible story God has allowed us to have. The future is still yet to be determined. To HIM belongs the glory!

My youngest daughter Sharon says....

So writing this is requiring me to go back seven years, and as weird as it is pretty much seven years to the date. Seeing pain, struggle and dark days in black and white is almost stomach turning. This is my story though, and it is just that – it's mine.

Let me set the stage for you a bit. I am the baby of three and grew up as a preacher's kid my whole life. The job was not so bad. I was loved by everyone around me, and had family always around – church family that is. It was as if I had many aunts, uncles, grandpas and grandmas. So the fish bowl living was easy to tolerate since there was such a bond.

I purchased my first home that summer and was so excited and pre-occupied with the dealings of getting it ready to close and to move in. Everything was going so incredible. I was at the height of my business career with getting a promotion and my social calendar was slammed full. I was deeply involved with mentoring in the summer programs and youth group at church, sang lead in a praise band, sang in the choir, and was playing church softball, with my best friend.

Quickly my life and the control I had on it began to unravel faster than you can imagine.

I began to notice things were not right with my dad. I had noticed some unsettling conversations and looks between him and my mom's best friend, his secretary. I had noticed his family involvement had been tapering off as well. We were his number one so that was extremely weird for me to see. I held these thoughts so very close to myself and would not dare breathe a word of what I thought was ludicrous and frankly felt guilty for even thinking those thoughts.



Sharon, Casey, Lila & Sophy

One October day my sister stopped by my house. I mentioned that I just did not trust anyone anymore. She tried to get me to say exactly what I meant.

Was it reality? Was it speculation? Whatever it was, my sister was feeling and had witnessed some of the same things. As I write this I am only feet away from where that conversation took place, and I can still feel the guilt for even discussing it. We decided this would stay between us and us alone! I did not want my mom to find out. My role had always been to be protector and fixer of whatever mom needs. As a pastor, dad was put under a lot of demands and time expectations with other people; I filled his shoes a lot with taking care of mom with making her feel special as she always did with us growing up. So, her not knowing any of this was vitally important.

The next three months were spent following dad's every foot step, phone and phone log, and daily timeline. We took turns following both dad and his secretary, listening to phone calls, tracing their steps. I was determined to prove my thinking was wrong, and that it was my own distorted point of view. I slowly realized it was not creative thinking, but reality that dad was having an affair; that word "affair" and relating it to my dad still makes me feel disconnected from my own body.

So, now we were faced with how to stop it with no one finding out, especially mom. It was a question too big for me to wrap my brain around. Surely I can fix this before mom will ever find out and our family will remain together!

Well, I'm sure you can tell now by my writing this account that mom did find out. As the details unfolded, she became such a warrior, a woman I had to let go of to let her be. I thought she would never make it through that kind of news; this is where I first hand witnessed God. At the same time I was first hand witnessing Satan's work in dad. It was an authoritative unveiling of the power of what both good and evil can do when given free reign and influence in a person's life, the powers of the earth colliding-spiritual warfare at its most brutal point.

The next step that had to be handled quickly was dealing with informing the church. My brother was in Michigan with his family for Christmas visits. I was desperately awaiting his arrival so he could lead in this devastating situation. Dad met with the deacons and resigned his church; a move I know was so heartbreaking for him. Dad loved God – his family – and the church, but, I believe at this point he was ready to spew it all out and stop the lifestyle he had led for the last six months. We all met back at the house and sat in the living room. It was so dark and hopeless; mom seemed to take care of all of us, and assured us all something would work out. At that point in my mind I knew they had no jobs, nowhere to go, and would they even remain married?

How would our family make it? Would our family survive? I was so angry with dad because for so many years I had tried to stay out of trouble out of respect for his job as a pastor, knowing that if I messed up he would resign his

ministry. Yet, he wasn't thinking about us when he made his decisions that he had made recently. He had not been there for me through the heartaches I was experiencing and also in buying my house because he was too busy – too busy taking care of someone else.

My brother arrived that night, and immediately went over to hug dad. Dad was nearly motionless and whimpered in despair. This began the long night before the morning that Dad would face the whole church. I remember this night so well, because it was just us five again – Dad, Mom, Tom, Beth, and myself. There was a silent confusion that filled the room that night. The three of us slept on the floor that night with mom and dad on each couch. The only noise you could hear was the radio playing quietly in the kitchen. We lived in the country and the stations were static at times. The sound seemed to be clear that night as the song “Be near” played several times throughout the night: “for dark is light to You, depths are height to You and far is near but Lord, I need to hear from You – be near, oh God be near, oh God of us Your nearness is to us our good be near, oh God be near, oh God of us Your nearness is to us our good, our good.”

As I look back on this night, what seemed to be hopelessness was actually a night I believe God Himself as Comforter was there. He was right there in that living room touching each of us with His loving hands and wiping our tears away as we each needed loving on us each individually as only He knew how to do.

The next evening we all met in dad's office. We prayed and formed a bond there stronger than even our bond before. We would walk into the sanctuary together, and we would support each other until the very end. I just knew that the church would rally around us and pray for us and help us through this event. I mean, it seemed likely since dad and mom had always been there for each member of that church through there joys and sorrows. I would soon learn that I was absolutely wrong.

After we had moved our parents to the unbelievable City of Refuge we returned home and in the days and next few weeks to come we would be ignored at church, scorned at grocery stores, gossiped about, and have to attend meetings where the fate of my parents' financial state was being voted on. We finally made a decision between the siblings that our life long church could no longer accept who we were, and that we had to find another place to worship and serve. We then supported each other. All we had ever known was the church people and they were family to us. There were so few that tried to even reach out to us. With my parents moved out of town, and friends all gone, I was in a desperate state. I even went back to church on a Wednesday night and sat in my car and wanted so bad to go in and get some direction and some answers on what I was supposed to do now. I was only greeted with a few members wanting to give me their take on the situation; I guess they figured I had given up on dad like they had, so they were just going to load more trash

on him; but he was still my daddy, and that hurt.

I was not working now and really had no intention of going back to work. I never left my house for fear of seeing church people who would turn the other way, and frankly I was an emotional zero after the months leading up to this whole fiasco, and was so dismayed by those reactions around me. It was so tough to deal with betrayal on every angle of interaction in my life. It's like I had been thrust into a different planet of some sort, and I didn't know which way to go, or what to do. I ignored phone calls and cut off all relationships with anyone except for my family and an angel God sent me who is now who I call my husband.

I was in a place I can't really describe in words to you. It's as if the entire world knew the struggles of my family. I visited mom and dad often, but at the end of every trip was returning to my hometown. Dad had done a great job at reaching beyond his church and into the community he was in. So this greatly affected our hometown, and there weren't too many people that did not know in the secular and religious realms; that is just the influence he had. I began to wonder where all the people that said they loved me were at. I was so naive to think that the people of our church loved me for me, and not for my position as the preacher's kid. I felt so lonely. I lived by myself and was doing nothing. I had to drink daily, truly, just to make it through the day mentally. My whole world as I knew it was blown up like an atomic bomb with nothing left to even piece together.

I stopped going to that church and eventually tried out a few more, but it was pointless. I just wanted to be at home alone. The swirl of differences of emotions each day is hard to explain. I wanted so bad to wake up and it all be at the end of this terrible ride. What I didn't realize at the time was each day was needed to experience those feelings. I didn't feel like I could be angry at what was going on because we had to hold our heads high and stick together as a family. Yet I wanted to scream and cut off all ties from any of this.

Seven years have passed, and there are not enough words that can give you the highs and lows of the path I have taken. I feel like I am just on the beginning of my journey again with a God that I never truly knew before. My take on the God thing was "do everything you can at church ministry wise, and try to not get into trouble, sing your songs, tithe, and hang out with good people." That's only what people see. The realness of the Christian life comes from the inside, our hearts.

Through this journey I have experienced God, I have not always run to him, but as I look back on each turn of the events, He was there, in a quiet watchful way. He was there the night the five of us slept in the living room, He was there when I left my parents in Atlanta, and He was there at nights when I was alone and so confused, angry and hopeless. He was there in people placed strategically in our lives years ago that God knew would be our small support team.

I now attend a church where freedom in Christ is so apparent. I am always learning new ways how God's qualities of protector, comforter, forgiver, strength, trust, love are worked out in my life. I feel as if even when I worship I understand what I am singing, it's no longer about the words; I feel it. I have been there and experienced His qualities first hand. I worship His character. I look forward to every chance I have to thank Him for His map of my life and newly found freedom. I have seen Him work miracles in each one of my family members. I have seen him make dreams become reality. I have seen Him grow our relationships when I thought before they couldn't get any closer. I thought no family could ever survive this, but we not only survived; we have thrived. I have a daddy now. I never realized how before I had to share him with so many others. It was always my mom I called if I needed anything at all. Conversations could and may have been a bit uncomfortable with dad. I cannot explain to you now how much I have grown to respect my mom and her abilities to guide and to be the glue and warrior for our family, and just how much I have grown to love my dad so very much and grown so very close to him, I am daddy's little girl. My parents' relationship together with God in the center is truly an amazing example to me of perseverance and unconditional love. Because of that I am able to love at a deeper level.

These are my words; this is my heart. I am learning each day how to be a child of God. I have a different view now of God now as a Father. I am ready to keep growing in His love and to take the hurt, rejected, and hopeless feelings I walked through and see just how much He loves me. I have learned to love others in a real way. My real relationship with Him is just beginning and I am ready to run until I am in His arms of love. He has turned my mourning into dancing; He has turned my sorrow into joy.

The journey continues into the future....

After graduation at the City of Refuge, Dr. Jerry Falwell invited me to come to Lynchburg and join the Liberty University School of Religion Faculty. In July of 2005 I became a part of Liberty and attended Thomas Road Baptist Church.

In the fall of 2006 I was invited to start a Sunday school class at Thomas Road Baptist Church. I prayed about it, accepted the challenge and called Troy Haas, director of the City of Refuge, asking him what would he recommend that I teach relating to spiritual and emotional health and he immediately, without hesitating said, TrueFaced. I ordered the study materials that included the life changing, TrueFaced message. It made such an impact on our class that we decided to turn right around and repeat the whole course again! By God's grace that series of studies helped me to continue my restoration process and made such an impact on me that I could not look at anyone without wondering what kind of emotional baggage might be hindering them from living out of who God says they are. The study consumed me. The three authors of TrueFaced, Bruce McNicol, John Lynch and William Thrall paints a

clear distinction between two very different underlying motives Christians sometimes operate under; our determination to please God or to trust Him. TrueFaced shows us how we can trust Him more and live out of our identity in Christ. Most Christians' primary motive is to please God, an admirable motive, but one that leads inevitably to filtering the Scripture through a lens of do's and don'ts, a performance mentality, and an inability to conquer sin, or to be honest about it. People whose primary motive is to please God hide their sin, and wear masks to cover up their own shortcomings. Their duplicity damages their relationships with the people around them and leads to frustration and desperation. In Scripture, Jesus said they would know Christians by their love, not by their better behavior. The Christian church is paying a high price for its failure to fully grasp the concept of grace. Polls suggest 60 to 80 percent of young people are leaving the church where they were raised, as they see their parents' faith has not worked for them. Turned off by hypocrisy, they seek a place where they can be authentic and vulnerable. The authors tell us that there's a movement afoot now in which people are beginning to say, "How do we create authentic, nurturing environments?" The solution is to make trusting God the primary motive, not pleasing God. That attitude shift changes everything, as people realize that on their worst day, "God is crazy about them." People fear that if others truly know them, they will reject them, but the opposite is true. Love is a process of meeting needs. If I don't admit I have needs, I never get loved by you. A healthy environment creates a way for me to be safe enough to let you know where I'm failing, where I'm weak. The message of grace is not a license to sin. Grace is the only way that takes sin seriously and allows God's power to deal with sin, not my self-effort, resulting in great openness and freedom. Real grace doesn't take sin lightly. Grace is a soil in which the seed of truth can germinate, and grow this beautiful tree whose fruit is heartfelt obedience.

As a Liberty University professor we are given the privilege to continue our education. As a result of my journey I recently finished my Doctor of Ministry thesis relating it to my personal journey entitled, "Forced Terminations Among Clergy: Causes and Recovery" One of my graduate courses was, The Development of the 21st Century Minister. That course even further helped my understanding of spiritual and emotional health and acquainted me with other resources such as Peter Scazzero's, The Emotionally Healthy Church and Emotionally Healthy Spirituality. We were extensively tested as well as grasping and understanding the journey from our nature and nurture concluding that 80% of the outlook and habits of life come from our family of origin and particularly our Dads.

I think that the understanding of our "Identity in Christ, living out of who God says I am" which I learned from TrueFaced is the key to the Believer's life. When I embraced that truth freedom came to me like I have never experienced it in my entire Christian life.

This journey of restoration has pointed me toward young pastors who struggle in emotional health and churches that are constantly dealing with conflict. I contend that if the local church does not have good spiritual and emotional health then it can hardly have the impact of being a Great Commission church of reaching the world for Jesus Christ. I have recently studied very intensely the role of the transitional pastor with the goal of helping churches in conflict to becoming spiritually healthy. I am presently serving as an intentional interim pastor teaching truefaced principles of spiritual health. Betty and I are trusting God to use us as he sees fit. What has been such a painful journey has turned into freedom, realness and true inner joy.

My passion is to see the church of Jesus Christ get real, authentic, transparent, accountable and therefore heal from all the inside baggage that we have carried throughout our lives. If we could forgive all the sins or wrongs done to us and seek forgiveness of all the wrongs that we have done to others then maybe revival and world evangelization can come before He comes.



The Powell's

T.A. lives with his wife Betty in the Lynchburg, Virginia area where he is a Professor in the School of Religion for Liberty University Online. In addition, he presently serves as the Intentional Interim Pastor for Covenant Community Church of Martinsville, Virginia.

They have one son, Tom, married to Wendy and have four children, Julia, Tré, Jack and Jude. They also have two daughters, Beth, married to David Baxter with two children, Allison and Travis. The youngest daughter, Sharon is married to Casey Downey. They have two girls, Lila and Sophy.

