

## ***Road to the End of Compromise 7-7-02***

My parents had two girls born four years apart. They prayed together and covenanted with God that if He would give them a boy, they would give him back to God. Six years later God took them up on it and answered their prayer. I was born in Oakland, California. We moved to Scotland when I was still a baby, so that my Father could work on his Ph.D. He was writing his thesis on evangelists of a certain era. Returning to the USA, he started several churches in the Phoenix area. Then he taught at California Baptist College in Riverside while pastoring the college church. I was in church at least three times a week. I must have been a little jealous of my father's attention being toward his parishioners as I would often make gesture getting attentions to steal his attention back to me. It got his attention, and my mom's, who would drag me out of the sanctuary and paddle my behind.

Baptists of that day preached a lot of hellfire messages and I sure didn't want to end up there. Whatever those hand signals meant they must have been pretty bad to deserve a spanking, so as a 5-year-old I began to pray every night. I had heard enough altar calls that I knew just what to pray. "Jesus come into my heart, forgive my sins and save me from hell." But nothing seemed to happen. This went on for about a week, and then one night the Holy Spirit got my attention. He whispered this question to my heart, "Don't you want me in your heart because I love you." That was not at all how I looked at it. I wanted a Fire Insurance Policy. He wanted a relationship. Looking back as I got older I realized that experience was truly God and not a 5 year-old's imagination. When I said, "Yes", I knew I was saved, born again.

When my father came home from one of those many church meetings, I told him, "Daddy, I got saved! Jesus came in my heart!" I'll never forget him telling me Bill Bright's illustration of the throne in the heart. Up until that moment I had been on the throne of my heart, but now I must let Jesus sit there and direct my life, make my decisions, and give me His directions. I didn't realize then how much that illustration would be come back to guide me.

Life was good. We had a nice home. The back yard was big with several old walnut trees. One was big enough for a little tree fort. A block away the Santa Ana River wilderness area. Summers were often spent with my Grandpa in Oak Creek Canyon and that was even more fun. One summer day, a friend of the family came to take my sister and me home early. The tension built as we neared our home. Something was wrong. He stopped in a grocery store parking lot a few blocks from the house. My mother was in the hospital. My father had gone to heaven. Much later I learned he had taken his own life and almost taken my mother with him. I thought I might end up as the adopted child of the friend that came to pick us up. My mother eventually recovered and in time life got back to a regular rhythm.

My mother remarried, which most children really don't like. They lose the attention they had come to take for granted and feel their father is being replaced. We moved to Oak Creek Canyon when I was eleven. That was like a dream come true. I loved it here, though young people always complained there was nothing to do. It was a great place to grow up.

At twelve years old I attended a Baptist church, now a restaurant at the corner of Jordan and Apple. The sermon was on Romans 12:1-2 (NIV)

*<sup>1</sup> Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship.*

*<sup>2</sup> Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

I didn't hear much of the sermon. Every word of that verse was like it came from the lips of God to me. I fought the idea of going forward until I saw the reference under the closing hymn was Romans 12:1,2. The Pastor encouraged me to take a stand for Jesus and be different, to carry my Bible to school with me and tell people about Jesus' love.

Being a young boy in my early teens I did not want to hear that. I was trying to impress the girls. That took up most of my thoughts. But I did start to take my Bible with me. 'Compromise' is probably the best word to describe the High School years. I was really hungry for a mentor, but I couldn't find one. The Pastor that encouraged me had been fired. The church had no real youth programs. When I turned 16 I began to have Bible studies in my home. A group of teenage boys would come and we would read the Bible together and talk about what we thought the passage meant. One night as we read there was a deep sense that what we were reading was very different from how we lived. I suggested we all pray and ask God to show us what we were missing. After a few minutes of silently praying the room was filled with the presence of Jesus. I can't describe it any other way. Those teenage boys were crying – joy, conviction, peace, all in the deepest sense of the words. We experienced His presence in a way that we would never forget. I prayed over each boy. We hugged each other. Then we talked about what that experience might mean.

I wish I could say that was the end of the compromise in my life. It wasn't by any means. I was getting drunk on the weekends. Moved out of my house when I was seventeen to get away from my Step-Dad's fits of rage. I was torn between worldliness, (alcohol and girls) and wanting to know Jesus. The flesh and spirit were at war within me. Each was trying to claim the throne of my heart.

Graduating second in my class, I had a full tuition scholarship to Baylor University. I really did not know what I wanted to do but was thinking about pre-med. The idea that the message of Romans 12:1,2 was my call to preach the Word was something I refused to dwell on. About that time a friend that went to my Bible study had hitched a ride in Phoenix and met some radical young Christians. This was at the height of the Jesus' People movement. An off shoot of it, called The Children of God, had picked him up. The fact that they spoke boldly about Jesus and prayed with my friend, really intrigued me. The commune where they lived was right on my way to Baylor. That night I prayed about it and really believed the LORD spoke to my heart to go there and live with them. I told my parents, who were, of course, shocked. I was working at a gas station (now the Texaco at the Y) and told my boss I was going to serve Jesus. I thought I could always go on to Baylor if I was wrong. I convinced a local friend to come along with me.

When I got there and saw the smiles and expressions of love, I thought for sure I was home. It seemed so much like the book of Acts. They shared Luke 14:33 with me.

Whoever does not forsake all that he has cannot be Jesus' disciple. I gladly gave them my car and bank account. I was living a life of faith. I had given up everything for Jesus and possessed nothing. We studied the Bible and went into the Dallas and Ft. Worth to witness in the parks. Finally, I thought I had quit compromising my convictions. I prayed for a greater love for God's word and God answered my prayer. I memorized the Bible everyday. Gradually over the following months I learned that there was a leader of this group. His writing became more and more important to the members until it finally was on par with the Bible. That is the first sign of a cult: one man has the truth and all must listen to this specially gifted one. That is why it is so important to have a number of men in the congregation share the Word. I'm so glad that while I was away on vacation you heard a good message and had some good Bible studies. We need to do that and not just when I'm gone.

I could tell you some incredible stories of God's provision, healing, and salvation but that was all God's mercy in the midst of an ever-darkening situation. We still witnessed to people about trusting Christ as their Savior but our lives gradually began to resemble my teen years of compromise and even worse. We had a justification for everything we did. I went with the group to Hawaii and then to Japan as they spread out around the globe. In Japan I met my wife, Mariko. We were married, and a year later our first child was born. When she was pregnant with our second child, Daniel, God began to open my eyes. It happened almost too quickly. The verse I had memorized haunted me, "By their fruits you will know them." (Matt 7:20) We cast that verse to the nominal Christians but now it was coming home to convict me. When I thought the last seven years had been more a mockery of the God than building the Kingdom of God, the worship of man rather than of Jesus, I thought there was no hope for me. If I could be that deceived how would I ever know if I had the truth? In utter despair I tried to drink myself to death, but God had mercy on me.

We left the group behind, though it took years to get it out of my heart and mind. I lived for three months in a deserted mountain village just to reread my Bible and try to see it through my own eyes, not what I was taught in the cult. I knew I had to begin again from scratch to build a whole new life for my family. We built a house in the mountains of Japan for Daniel to be born in. God was so gracious and patient, but compromise still flooded my thought life. The patterns of thinking were so deep and well worn that I needed a miracle to change them.

I found work teaching English as a second language. I took correspondence courses from an American University and earned degrees in passive solar Engineering. We started our own English school while we tried to build a business in passive solar design. Then the mercy of God took my motorcycle and laid it down in a curve on the pavement. Immediately before the accident I had been trying to develop an idea that God just wanted me to enjoy life and do what was right, you know, not get so serious about serving God. I was still trying to escape the call of God on my life and His Lordship – the right I had given Him to sit on the throne of my heart. That accident landed me in the hospital where I could meet an independent missionary. He was one of the few foreigners in the little mountain town where we lived. God used him to encourage my faith and help me get back on track. Now the struggle to change my thought life and surrender again to His right to rule my life began to intensify.

After building the English school for four years we heard the call of God to take us back to the USA. We sold the school and the home – a story in itself, and moved back to care for my Grandmother. We were starting all over again. I went to Grand Canyon University in Phoenix and worked on a passive solar spec home and valet parked cars for extra income. We ended up living in our spec home as my grandmother thought we were trying to poison her. I tried to attend church but it seemed so watered down. One of the major Phoenix churches even reminded me of the cult I left, as the pastor claimed he was the one sure source for pure water and clean pasture for God's flock.

After awhile, we saw there was nothing to keep us from moving to Sedona. The only work I could find was landscaping. The demand for passive solar engineers was next to nothing since the oil crisis had come and gone. My grandmother passed away and left us a little money that we invested in a video store. For seven years we ran that business but about two years into it, I met a neighbor that had a Bible study in his home. I started attending and then helping teach. I felt led to buy a guitar so we could worship in song. After I became comfortable worshipping with them I started to attend the church where he worshipped. It was the Christ Center. After a couple of years there I began to teach a Bible study and volunteered part time as part of the staff.

In '94 I went to a Promise Keeper's rally in Denver. One of the speakers talked about compromises in our thought life. He referred to them as little pet snakes that were really venomous and would one day kill us. We think they are under control and in our power – but like a little coral snake, they are waiting for a chance to sink their teeth into us and fill us with their deadly venom. Again the Lord was speaking directly to me. I determined that by the grace of God I would never again willingly compromise. If I was in doubt about anything I would not do it, dwell on it, or even think about. As much as was possible I determined in my heart to instantly obey the Holy Spirit in any leading He impressed me with, whether it was food, prayer, the speed limit, sharing with someone, or whatever. I felt a real liberation having forsaken my own ways. I determined in my heart that my life would only be about seeking the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. Everything would have to conform to that one goal. (Matt. 6:33)

When I returned to Sedona from that P.K. conference I felt the Holy Spirit trying to commune with me. I got still and listened like I did when I was 16. The conversation went something like this. I asked, "What do you want me to do, LORD?" "What do you want to do?" came the Holy Spirit's reply. "I want to serve You in preaching and teaching your Word, but I have been so misled and compromised so long I feel like David, unworthy to build your Temple." Then I heard the answer that broke my heart. "If you are willing, I AM." What? Could it be true? I knew it was God. I cried tears of joy, peace, conviction, love – too many emotions. I was going to begin again, once again. I was giving Him back the throne of my heart after so many years.

I entered the Wesleyan pastoral program and started serving full time on the staff of the church. We were able to sell the store just in time to go to Israel on a tour. Nearing the end of my classes things began to go very wrong at the church I was ministering in. I could not support it by staying on the staff and yet felt it was not my place to speak out. Now without a business and no opportunities to pastor I was in no man's land. We were starting all over again. I was leaving everything again to stay faithful to the leading of the Holy Spirit. But leaving all really only happens once. All the following times are just a

continuation of forsaking the world and what it has to offer to put Jesus first. This was the fourth time of letting go of all that had gone on before and seeking God to guide me into whatever and wherever He would lead. It was a time of severe testing but it was also a time we felt the LORD very near to us. We did whatever work we could find. Pastor Ed had us re-landscape his backyard. That helped me get through the transition. Roger hired me to move furniture, and that helped too. But I could only be happy doing one thing, preaching the Word. In the midst of this trial the Word began to come alive. I couldn't read any passage without seeing lessons and applications.

We looked at mission work in Japan, but no doors seemed to be open. The Wesleyan denomination said there were no churches for me to pastor. We tried attending a number of churches in the Verde Valley but did not feel led to any particular one. Finally we began to worship at home and soon others began to join us. Daniel helped with the web ministry, which miraculously went right to the top of a major search engine. We found an outreach to Japanese tourists. Cornerstone Christian Academy invited me to teach a Bible class to their teens. What a strange path to these blessings and these outreaches we never really had dreamed were God's real direction.

Then we sensed a call here, but the time was not right. I trusted God that if it truly had been His leading that eventually the church here would see it also, and praise the LORD you did. As I look back over the journey I realize the goal is today. The goal is living with a clear conscience with my God today, moment by moment. The great commandment says to love Him with our all. 'All' means no compromise, in action or thoughts. Anything that competes for the place He deserves on the throne of your heart must be renounced. Then you will be led into the fullness of what He has planned for your life. My parents' prayers were finally answered. When they prayed that they would give me to the LORD it did not mean that I would be a pastor, or a Bible teacher, it meant that I would be His to do with as He pleased.

That is the thing the Lord has been getting at from the time I was 5. "Don't you want me because I love you?" He must mean everything to us to love Him with our all. It has only been about five months since you called me to pastor here so most of you remember the vision I have for this fellowship. I want to see Wayside become a place full of the love of Jesus, a place where everyone loves God with their all. Out of that uncompromising commitment to Him we will love our neighbor as ourselves. I want to see it develop into a place known for the love of Jesus, a place where anyone who walks in will sense the love of God. Remember Maria's testimony? She walked into a church with spiked hair and pierced parts, army boots and all, and a little gray-headed woman threw her arms around her. Week after week that elderly woman told Maria she was glad she was there and that Jesus loved her. Let's be a church full of people like that, by the grace of God.

That verse in Romans 12:1,2 is for us all. It does not matter what work we are called to do, or if we are retired. We are all called to be living sacrifices. We are all called to give Jesus the throne in our hearts, and to let Him reign over all our decisions, all our desires, all our actions and reactions. God is drawing everyone of us down the road to the end of compromise. That is the place where He reigns over every area of our life for our good and His eternal glory. Don't you want Him because He loves you?