CHAPTER 1

Brave Beginnings – Small Steps

"All along, prayer has been the Holy Spirit planting love in me for Jesus, coaxing it out." – Meg

"Charlene you have to pray!" Michelle's desperate tone on the video call took Charlene off guard.

"Right now?" Charlene asked, "For what?"

Michelle's frantic words ran together like a messy collision between emergency and anticipation. "Charlene you have to pray!" she pleaded.

On her phone screen, Charlene saw a distraught woman sitting next to her friend. Michelle quickly introduced her neighbor who was seeking freedom from addictions and release from a traumatic past.

As a massage therapist, Charlene's genuine concern for others

has developed strong relationships of trust among her clientele. As a result, many of her clients, like Michelle, have become close friend

Though young in the faith, Charlene carries a boldness in prayer—prayer incubated in daily worship and sacred solitude with Jesus.

Though she felt unsure of the words to pray, Charlene slipped easily into interceding for the needs of a stranger. However, every sentence aimed toward Heaven was interrupted by Michelle. Charlene wondered whether either God or the two women on the other end of the video call understood anything she prayed.

"*Now*, Charlene!" Michelle interrupted yet again, 'The sinner's prayer. Do it now!"

Surprised, Charlene asked Michelle's friend if she desired to commit her life to Christ.

"Yes, please!" she confirmed.

Charlene joyfully led another person to Jesus.

An alien became a citizen.

A lost child found her way home.

A woman bound by addiction was set free.

An aimless wanderer found purpose and destiny.

With the past erased, a future unlocked and joy flooding away despair, the angels once again rejoiced (Lk 15:10). Thanks to the prayerful support of two ordinary women, an extraordinary relationship with Jesus Christ began. Perhaps the angels also shared a little head-scratching confusion and hand-slapping congratulations over humanity's blundering. Nonetheless, a waiting Heavenly Father heard and responded to unscripted, honest prayer.

"What is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?"
Psalm 8:4

Is this prayer? Does unorganized, frantic and incoherent

prayer qualify? Yes, it certainly does.

What matters most in prayer is sincerity of heart. Often, what makes no sense to our intellect makes perfect sense from God's perspective.

"The more the person praying believes the more catalytic how prayer will be fulfilled." – Patrick

God responds to the genuine plea of those who seek Him, in any language, under every circumstance. He answers eloquent, well-planned, neatly scrolled prayers. He also responds to hurried, harried, broken prayer.

And yes, because of it, Heaven rejoices. I can think of no greater miracle than the transformation God does when someone yields their life to Him and

light invades darkness,
prison doors swing open,
sight fills once spiritually blind eyes,
and songs break forth from the
soil of despair.

Personal Perspectives

As young as seven years old, Kevin wondered if God was real. Even though he went to church and took communion, Kevin felt there was an enormous distance between God and himself. As a young boy, whenever he had trouble falling asleep, he would reflect on God. Yet, he felt confused.

By the time he turned sixteen, the confusion had turned to fear. Though he assumed he was a Christian, he honestly didn't

know what that meant. Only three years later, he was heading in the wrong direction fast.

"Back home from my first year of university, I was working for the town. However, because of a severe spinal injury from playing hockey, I couldn't do anything without being loaded up on prescription painkillers. When I came to the end of summer, I had no money left. I was drinking daily and spending every penny at the local bar. I was on a destructive track.

"Here I was a 19-year-old guy who couldn't even stand up straight or sit down. Depressed, I didn't want to go back to university the way I was. Everything was on a bad track, although I maybe wasn't aware of it. My family had been set free from alcoholism. However, I was on a personal journey of recovery from being raised in a dysfunctional home.

"I met Merodee and beyond a question fell in love with her at first sight. She and her sister were crossing the street right in front of my vehicle. I slammed on the brakes to avoid hitting them. We held eye contact as she passed by.

"Shortly afterward, I invited her to a football game. Merodee brought some Christian music with her and saying nothing she took my music out of the cassette player and put hers in. We listened to her music on the way to the football game and back again. All I listened to for the next couple of days were the tapes she left in my car. I was so enamored by Merodee that her music captivated me.

"A little while later, I drove out to an old country church and parked outside the locked gate. I sat there, a nervous wreck, feeling very emotional.

"Suddenly, the palpable Presence of God entered my car."

"I started to talk to God, and He started to answer me. I knew, with no one ever telling me, what to do to be in a relationship with Him. I confessed my sins and asked Him into my life. It was such an incredibly emotional experience I couldn't even drive. I probably sat there for half an hour, unable to leave.

"I didn't understand anything, except I knew it was God. I knew God wanted a relationship with me.

"When I cried out, He was immediately present, closer than anything I had ever felt. I don't know if I had any other impression except knowing what I needed was God."

"That was the beginning of prayer for me when I felt the Presence of God for the first time. Looking back, I can close my eyes and still see everything and feel the same feeling, though not with the same emotion. Before then, I didn't even know if I believed in God. Yet He revealed himself to me in an unforgettable way.

"Afterward, I phoned Merodee and told her what had happened. She yelled into the phone, 'You're saved!'

" 'What does that mean?' I asked. I didn't even know."

"I'm a little naïve as to what the Lord delivered me from. I can't imagine where the track I was on would have led if I hadn't encountered God in that season.

Mark said,

"Letting go of the idea that I can somehow earn or merit God's love has perhaps been the greatest obstacle to resting in Him and enjoying His Presence, where legitimate prayer begins."

Yoge began her relationship with Jesus while living in her home country of India.

"When I was young, my grandmother was experiencing many problems. Someone welcomed her to church and told her about Jesus. They said, 'If you pray there, everything will be all right.'

"As a result, my grandmother was the first one in our family to accept Jesus and become a secret worshiper of God. When I was about four years old, she started taking me to church too, but I didn't realize what was going on. Maybe God chose me then, but it took many years for me to come to Him.

"In India, our work also determines our religion and cast. My private math tutor belonged to our cast. He was the one who helped me realize who Jesus was. If he wouldn't have been from our cast, I wouldn't have listened to him when he said, 'You need to know you aren't worshiping a real God, but worshiping idols instead. You shouldn't do that.'

"I thought, 'I know you. Why are you saying our god is not a god?' I asked, 'What happened to you? What made you

convert to Christianity?'

"He said, 'No, it's true! We are all idol worshipers.'

" 'Okay, let it be an idol.' I said, 'We're living a sophisticated life, doing what we want to do. Compared to other people, our standard of living is very good. What is there to blame this god for?'

"He said, 'It isn't the idol giving this to you; it is your living Father who is providing for you.'

" 'How can you prove it?'

"He continued, 'What if you have a kitty and think your pet is a god? One day the pet dies. You cry because you aren't ready to believe your pet is dead. You say to the dead kitty, 'I feel hungry and don't know what to do.' You're asking something dead to give you food. Will the dead pet give you food? Or will your mother, who is listening to you cry, give you food? Who will give you food?'

" 'Obviously, my mother,' I said, 'the dead pet can't give me food.'

" 'Yes!' he said, 'The Living God is the One who provides all these things you're asking for. Still, you believe your dead kitty is giving you food. It is not the dead kitty but your living mother who feeds you. In the same way, when you are worshiping and praying to an idol, your living Father God in Heaven listens to you and provides you with all the good things you ask for. It is the living God, not dead idols, who gives you all these things. Your Father in Heaven is watching you, knowing what His daughter needs, but sees she doesn't know who to ask.'

"While he was talking to me, he was weeping bitterly. He

spoke a simple word, but it was completely anointed. His weeping touched me deeply as I carefully listened to his words. God gave me the understanding that I had been praying to an idol, while He, my living Father, was beside me providing whatever I asked for.

"As I walked home, those thoughts rewound in my mind. I closed my eyes and started crying as I realized what I was doing when I worshiped our god. I knew what I was doing wasn't good. I asked forgiveness from my living Father in Heaven. 'I'm not going to worship idols anymore.' I said, 'I am going to live my entire life for You.'

"I started going to church every Sunday, but soon my Dad discovered I was worshiping Jesus. One day when I came home from church, he was ready to throw a brick at me to kill me. Because we were religious leaders in our cast, he said, 'I will kill you. I won't allow you to live as a Christian.' He also threatened to pour kerosene on me and burn me. The second time, he poured it on my head, but my grandmother came and saved me. Before going to church each Sunday, I mentally prepared myself for the beating I would get when I returned home.

"From the day I became a worshiper of Jesus Christ, I was crazy about God. I felt like He was sitting right beside me, talking to me. People wondered what happened and told me to limit my worship and devotion to God, but I never wanted to.

"I couldn't believe it! All this time I had worshiped lifeless idols. When I came to God, I knew, beyond a doubt, He was alive, sitting with me and talking to me. I felt Him moving all around me. Whatever I asked for in prayer happened. How do you deny it? No one can deny it!

"That's how my journey with Jesus Christ began."

For Shelly, prayer was a natural overflow of the relationship she entered with God. She tells her story,

"I had made so many poor decisions that eventually landed me into an abusive relationship with someone who completely isolated me. I had never felt so much hatred and was devastated. I didn't know there could be so much darkness. I would wake up thinking I was in a nightmare, but it was real. To him, it was a big game; he was grossly unfaithful. It was like I was trying to get out of my skin and away from the pain, but I couldn't get free.

"In desperation, I made an appointment to go through the steps of freedom through a ministry called Freedom in Christ. During those sessions, I received Jesus Christ as my Savior and began a personal relationship with Him.

"After two sessions lasting nine hours (spending most of the time on forgiveness), I forgave him and everyone else in my life. It was like everything dropped off me. In its place, I could feel God's love being poured inside me.

"As God's incredible love overwhelmed me, I instinctively knew that a relationship with Jesus Christ was where I wanted and needed to be forever. Looking back, I remembered experiencing the same love when I was four years old.

"I walked away totally changed—no longer consumed by hatred but overwhelmed by God's love. I had all kinds of grace for this man, tried to help him and prayed for him. But I got out."

As a child, Rachel moved to Canada where she became a Christian.

"I was born in China and lived there for eight years before coming to Canada. We didn't hear about the name of Jesus or Christianity in China. There were posters about evolution everywhere. I was afraid that one day I would turn into a monkey in a cage instead of a human being.

"In China, school is very competitive, but you're supposed to be friends with everyone in your classroom. One week before we left China, I had an argument with a classmate over an origami crane I had made. She found my crane and turned into a frog. When I discovered my crane had disappeared, I became angry. Normally, I wouldn't start a quarrel, but this time I did.

"In China, if a dispute arose, a class monitor would come to the class to help settle the problem. The girl told the monitor I lost my crane out of irresponsibility, so when she found it she made it into a frog. She kept crying and won the sympathy of the class monitor. They forced me to leave school permanently because of the argument.

" 'Okay, I will leave,' I thought, 'but where will I go.'

"God used this incident to prepare me to move away. Right after the dispute, I discovered my Dad and I were soon leaving to live in Canada. My grandmother, the first Christian in our family, had been praying for us to receive Christ.

"God, by His sovereign will works through people in unusual ways. We had a friend from China who enrolled at

Trinity Western University because a consultant who did not know Jesus specifically told her to go to this Christian University. It was there that her favorite memories developed and she first learned about Jesus. Even though we don't always understand how God moves, whether through arguments, class monitors or unbelieving consultants, God is working in our lives.

"As a child, I would believe whatever my Dad told me. When I was little, he told me Buddha held the earth. We didn't know about Jesus then, but when we came to Canada, Dad became a Christian. Dad told me about Jesus and why He had to die for our sins. Until then, I thought Jesus was a rebel. When God spoke to me through my Dad, I considered becoming a Christian. I didn't ask Jesus into my heart yet though.

"My first impression of Jesus was that He was like Santa. You could ask Him for something and He would give it to you. Later, I found out He is bigger than that. He is God and works the big picture. He desires for us all to come to Him so He can give us His grace.

"I started to change when I was nine years old and Jesus became personal. I prayed, but at first, my prayers were self-centered. Then I realized my parents also had needs. I started to pray for people to be healed and began to understand Jesus' love for others."

No matter what age, stage or circumstance of life, the prayer of committing one's life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ is the most powerful, miracle-working prayer anyone could pray.

Unmasking the Myth

One myth has kept many people from committing their lives to Jesus Christ and finding the love Shelly spoke about. This myth declares any god will do.

"We can always have a non-god to go to instead of God."
– Karin

Only Jesus can create the profound change Charlotte, Kevin and millions of others have experienced. Jesus desires for everyone to come to know the one and only true God.

"Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the *only* true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."
John 17:3
(Emphasis mine)

This same intimate relationship with God these people have spoken about is available right now to any who will sincerely come to Him.

"He longs for everyone to embrace his life and return to the full knowledge of the truth."
1 Timothy 2:4 TPT

God is waiting for everyone to embrace Him and the life He offers. God loves us and has an incredible plan for our future, regardless of our past (Ps 139:16). He desires for us to have a fulfilling, exciting life right now and forever—a life connected with Him (Jn 10:10).

Kate asked,

> "Does any other god communicate back to you? Does any other god respond to you like the Lord God? Does any other god give you life? Can another god forgive your sins?
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> "Jesus Christ is life. He gives us an unbelievable life now. Eternal life! Life is found in Jesus Christ alone. In Him is everything I need to exist—love, joy, peace and so much more. I don't want to look anywhere else or to anything else. Time is too precious to waste pursuing other so-called gods.
>
> "God is a life-giving Spirit. When You know your spirit is made alive by God's Spirit, that's it! You need nothing else.
>
> "The ultimate, Almighty God, is available. He is the One living true God. Until you meet Jesus, you don't know what you are missing."

"To communicate with Almighty God is incredible.
Knowing He wants to have fellowship
with us is very humbling.
It is the ultimate relationship to have."

Only one thing keeps us from experiencing this vital relationship with Him. God is holy and perfect. Only those who are without sin can come into His Presence and enjoy His wonderful plan and experience His Presence. Every one of us has sinned and comes far short of God's perfect standard (Rom 3:23).

God provided the solution for restoring intimacy with us through Jesus Christ, his Son. Jesus died on the cross to take our punishment and pay the price for our sins (Rom 5:8). It didn't end there! On the third day, Jesus rose from the grave as the giver of life for all (Rom 6:23).

The Bible says that by repenting and confessing the Lordship of Jesus, we can then live in a relationship with God. It sounds too simple for such a complicated problem (Rom 10:9-10). However, by accepting God's provision and committing our lives to Him, He makes everything new.

"The root of every prayer journey is a relationship with Jesus." – Jan

Like a baby begins to walk by taking slight steps, we begin the fascinating journey of faith through a seemingly small prayer spoken from sincere hearts. If you want to take this life-changing step today, He is only a prayer away.

"Dear God, I confess I have sinned against You and others. I choose today to believe Jesus died on the cross for the forgiveness of my sins. I turn from the way I have been living to follow You. Please forgive me and come into my life. I trust in You and desire for You to be my Lord and Savior from this day forward, in Jesus Name (Rom 10:13, Jn 20:31). Thank You, Lord, for all you have done for me. Thank You for Your love and the gift of Your saving grace."

"God wants to know me and make Himself known to me." – Heather

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"Prayer comes out of a place of being fully known. It is an evolving journey out of our relationship with the Lord." – Kristina

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"Prayer is a grace gift." – Merodee