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*Foreword by*  
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ANGELS  
*of*  
HUMILITY

A NOVEL

## Chapter 1

*“We are not human beings having a temporary spiritual experience; we are spiritual beings having a temporary human experience.” Pierre Teilhard De Chardin<sup>1</sup>*

A death was in progress in Room 120 of Bradbury Manor, the town’s nursing home. It is a wonderful, joyous death—a spiritual celebration in full swing. Two towering, ancient angels, clothed in dazzling garments of light, were singing, marching, and dancing around the figure of a frail, elderly lady, fetal and unconscious under a pink chenille bedspread. Sarah was unaware of the celestial celebration and the heavenly orders that would transition her into God’s paradise—the eternal dwelling place for which she was created.

The angels paused from their celebration. “A stroke,” whispered Malta, the worshipping angel smiling tenderly, as he gazed at Sarah’s face. “The Lord is eagerly waiting and I can hardly stand it myself.”

“At sunrise this frail little intercessor, who was so dynamic a witness on earth, is finally going to rest in the Lord’s arms,” says Joel, the warrior angel, his two-edged sword by his side, his eyes ever vigilant.

It was a little before 5 A.M. and the angels glowed with anticipation of the swallowing up of her temporal, earthly life into an eternity of love and peace.

*“Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints,”*<sup>2</sup> shouted Joel. They resumed their marching, dancing, and praising around the bed. Sarah was wholly protected in her utterly vulnerable state.

Huddled together in the corner of the room, growling, were several yellow-eyed spirits. The largest one, Death, was busy formulating a final plan of attack with the low-

ranking imps under his command. He despised them all. The feeling was mutual.

Just as they were ready to strike, Malta blew his shofar and the heavens opened. The atmosphere was energized with even more glory. Breathtaking sounds of celestial music wafted into the room along with heavenly colors and fragrances. Angels carrying instruments surrounded Sarah's bed. This heavenly choir followed Malta's worship, and their joyful praise not only filled the room, but flowed back to the throne of grace like a tidal wave of pure joy.

"Great, more angels—that's just what we need," whined Discouragement.

"Make them stop singing," wailed Depression. "I can't take any more worship. I think I'm going to be sick!"

"Enough complaining!" barked Death. "We've got to attack now. When I give the word, charge. Maybe one of you can get to her pathetic, wrinkled body. She's barely holding to life by a thread."

"We couldn't even get to her when there were just two of them—I'm not going anywhere near that bed!" yelled Infirmary, ducking quickly to avoid a blow from Death.

Fear of Man emphatically agreed. "Do you see those angels walking back and forth with the swords? Do you see the impenetrable wall of protection and glory around her? You can charge if you want, but I'm staying right here!"

"We've tried unsuccessfully to kill her for 16 months. Let's face it. We can't even steal one second from the life span appointed to her," said Intimidation.

Knowing it would indeed be impossible to penetrate the angelic worship, Death turned on these minion imps in anger.

"We had Sarah her whole life. How did you manage to lose her in the last year and a half?" he screamed. "Do you

realize what she set in motion? This one wretched little old lady has started an avalanche of sal-sal-salvations around the world. You're all a bunch of incompetent idiots, and we'll be tortured for failing this mission!" The imps retaliated by hissing, cursing, scratching, and blaming each other for their failure.

Joel gazed intently at them with eyes like blazing fire. He unsheathed his flaming two-edged sword, and on his next pass by that side of the room, he slashed through the gnarled demonic mass. They vaporized into a harmless puff of yellow sulfurous smoke. Joel grinned as he re-sheathed his sword, "I love my job."

With the sun slightly below the horizon, the angels gathered around the bed in hushed excitement. Joel and Malta, always on the alert, bent over Sarah.

"Soooo—close," whispered Malta, stroking Sarah's forehead and smiling at Joel. They'd been her guardians for 16 months. Unbelievably, they felt even more love for Sarah welling inside them than before. "Get ready," said Joel, gazing into the opened Heaven, awaiting the final word. Malta lay his hand on Sarah's chest to feel her breathing, a little shallower each time.

"NOW!" shouted Joel, having received orders from the fiery throne. As her last breath escaped her frail, fleshly shell, the sun's first rays peeked over the horizon. Surges of light permeated the room as the heavenly corridor of glory touched earth. Sarah's spirit emerged into Malta's waiting arms. Glancing back at the bed, she caught a glimpse of her aged face, ashen-colored and wrinkled. She was whisked through the portal toward an unseen realm of eternity by a jubilant Malta, with Joel flying ahead. Escorted by her two triumphant angels, she was moving faster than the speed of light.

Liquid warmth enveloped Sarah. For the first time ever, she felt the complete absence of pain and the presence of total peace. She was leaving behind all sin and its damning results, with which she had lived since birth. Shielded by her two ecstatic angels, she moved rapidly toward a brilliant light in the remote distance.

## Chapter 2

*“Christ doesn’t become precious to us until we are humble. When we preoccupy ourselves with our own wants and needs we can’t see the matchless worth of Christ. Also, until we comprehend how lost we are we can’t understand Christ’s wondrous and redeeming love. Until we see our poverty we can’t see His riches. No man enters the kingdom without understanding his own sinfulness and realizing his need to repent.” John MacArthur<sup>1</sup>*

Sixteen months earlier:

Bradbury was a small rural Missouri community of 8,000. Some still farmed their family’s ground. Others commuted to Mt. Pielor 15 miles away to work in the factories or stores that had sprung up there. These stores provided much needed jobs and less expensive goods and services, but also drew business away from Bradbury’s town square.

Sarah was a widow who had lived her whole life in Bradbury. It had only been six months since cancer had stolen her beloved George away from her. The ache was no less intense; it still consumed her every waking minute and intruded on her dreams as well. Over the last two years of his declining health, she had gone from introvert to recluse, sitting by his bed, caring for him each day.

In the beginning stages of the disease, he was still talkative, but as he deteriorated, she spent hours just sitting beside him in silence. To pass the time she read books on raising orchids and taught herself to crochet. Now, six multi-colored afghans were folded in Sarah’s hall closet waiting to be donated to a good cause—the Elk’s Club Raffle or maybe the High School’s yearly fundraiser.

Sarah was an shy and had many insecurities. Unable to have children, she had spent her life as a wife, doting on George. Her only contact with the outside world toward the end was the visiting nurses and Dr. Newbury. After George's death Sarah was totally alone, except for the demonic spirits who had flooded in to convince her that her life no longer had purpose. Agoraphobia kept her housebound except for necessary trips to the grocery store. At night, before she fell asleep, was the worst time of her whole dreadful day. The spirits clamored around, tormenting her, planting thoughts in her mind with their sticky voices:

“George is dead. You'll never see him again,” shrieked Discouragement. “He's gone forever.”

“No one else loves you,” whispered Lying.

“You've got nothing to live for, no kids—no grandkids,” growled Death.

When she managed to sleep, she slept fitfully. She woke frequently. Sarah eventually became afraid of sleep because she was besieged by terrifying dreams about George's death involving dismemberment and other gruesome images.

One night Suicide arrived at bedtime. “Since you idiots can't seem to carry out your orders to do away with one pathetic, elderly lady, I've been sent to take over. For some reason this is an urgent, priority assignment.”

He slithered into Sarah's bedroom and whispered, “What a loser, you couldn't have kids. You've given your whole life to being a wife; now you're not. You've done what you were put here to do. Your purpose in life is over. You're just taking up space in your old age.”

*What's left for me?* wondered Sarah. *It's all down hill from here.*

“Have you considered just ending your miserable, pathetic existence? The afterlife has got to be better than the present—the horrid grieving and the continual pity-party that consumes you.”

When she finally dozed off from total exhaustion at 4:00 A.M., Suicide lay coiled around her, whispering wicked thoughts. She was barraged by scenes of taking her own life—using a razor blade, crashing her car, jumping off a bridge, overdosing on pills, even shooting herself. She awoke screaming at 4:15 and refused to go back to sleep.

Sarah was helpless as she felt her life spiral downward. Full-blown depression and exhaustion consumed her. Now she was too scared to leave the house even to grocery shop. There was no food, but it didn't matter; she had no appetite. Food no longer tasted good, and she began to drop weight from her already small frame.

“It's just a matter of weeks before she succumbs to me,” said Depression, smiling. “She's lost her will to live—”

“She should have been dead months ago,” interrupted Suicide. “I'll get her before you do. She's highly vulnerable now. Her grief and exhaustion make her susceptible to taking her own life. I'm going to rub her nose in it that she never had kids.” He sneered at Depression as he slithered next to Sarah and wrapped his scaly constricting body around hers.

“Well, one of us needs to take her out quickly,” whispered Death. “I've heard rumors from the enemy's kingdom that she has a great destiny.”

“At her age?” sniped Discouragement. “She's 71 years old and still as lost as a goose in a cloudburst. She's spent her whole life barely thinking about God. She's been ours all her pathetic life.” His black lips curled into a smirk. “And she will be ours in death—for all eternity.”

When Suicide replied, “The Godhead has worked miraculously through stranger people than her,” a simultaneous chill penetrated the demonic horde.

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Pastor Hall was sitting in his cluttered office reading his devotions. His radiant guardian angel, Aaron, full of wisdom and knowledge, waited until Pastor Hall read the section about God’s heart for the widows and orphans. When he saw the word *widows*, Aaron reminded him of something he was going to do six months ago.

He absent-mindedly ran his fingers through his silver grey hair. *Where would I have put that?* He rummaged through the bottom drawer of his old mahogany desk. The first layer was last month’s bulletins, then the file with the church’s electric bills and several candy bar wrappers, *I gotta get rid of the evidence*, he thought, resting his hand on his ample waist. He finally found what he was looking for at the bottom of “get-to-it-someday” papers—George’s obituary from the Bradbury Gazette. Neither George nor Sarah had ever been to the church as far as he could remember, but Pastor Hall had made it a practice to visit all the community members who had hard times, whether they were church members or not. He’d done it for the last 18 years.

He closed his worn, leather-bound Bible with the dog-eared pages. *Maybe they’ll get me a new one at my retirement party. This one is pretty much falling apart.* With a prayer on his lips he bounded to his car. Soon he pulled up in front of Sarah’s small white bungalow with purple lilacs surrounding the front porch. His wife always commented on those lilac bushes, but he never knew who lived there.

He whistled all the way up the sidewalk. He loved sharing the Gospel. As near as he could figure, he’d been to

almost half the homes in the whole town. He stopped to take a whiff of the fragrant lavender flowers before knocking on the screen door.

Although Pastor Hall had never seen Sarah, he was taken aback by the haggard figure with the sunken eyes staring at him suspiciously through the screen door. Her hair was unkempt, there were bags under her eyes, and her dress was just hanging on her frail body. "Send him away," growled Deception. "You've got no time for him." After a friendly introduction, Sarah overcame her distrust and invited him in.

Sarah was sudden aware of how a new person would see her surroundings. She felt her face flush as she saw coffee cups half full left scattered throughout the room. The vacuum cleaner still plugged in from 4 weeks ago. Unwatered orchids were dying everywhere. She grabbed the plate with a half eaten piece of moldy toast and tried to conceal it.

"Please, sit here," she pointed to an overstuffed floral chair by the fireplace; "I'll make us some coffee." She retreated to the kitchen. *What is wrong with me?* She threw the toast in the sink. *I'm losing it.* She cradled her face in her hands as she waited for the coffee. *I can't do anything right..*

"*That's right sister,*" whispered Discouragement. "*You're just takin' up space.*"

The spiritual atmosphere in the house was oppressive. While Sarah was in the kitchen Pastor Hall prayed and rebuked the demonic. He couldn't see them, but he could sense their evil presence by the revulsion he felt in his spirit, and he could see their obvious influence on Sarah.

In response to his prayer, two magnificent angels appeared in the room. Joel, a warrior angel, towered over nine feet tall; his chest was covered with a golden

breastplate, and he carried a sharp two-edged sword on his hip in an ornately decorated golden sheath. He was fierce in holiness, constantly alert, and had eyes like flaming fire.

Malta, a worshipping angel, wore a brilliant white robe with a golden sash holding a shofar at the waist. In large pockets around his robe he carried a flute, lyre, and harp. Other pockets held scrolls of heavenly music tied up with ribbons. Glistening light reflected off his golden-blond hair.

Alive with God's presence, they reflected the glory of Heaven and brought its fragrance with them wherever they went. Their heavenly bodies were strong and lean, but their real power was their constant lifeline with the Trinity. They were always aware of Father's orders. Joel and Malta had been ministering together since they were created, the warrior and the worshipper, each equally capable of defeating the enemy; together--unstoppable.

When Sarah came back from the kitchen, she felt her mood elevate slightly for the first time in months. Also, something told her she could trust the man sitting in front of her. After a few questions from Pastor Hall, she sobbed as she poured out her heart about how hard the last few years had been with George's cancer and then her depression.

After about 20 minutes she mostly composed herself and ended by saying, "Life's not worth living anymore. I'm just waiting to die. I'm embarrassed to say it," she looked away from his compassionate eyes and stared at the floor, "But I've even thought of taking my own life. I-I was never able to have children and now my husband is dead. There's nothing left for me now."

"Oh, Sarah, I'm so sorry for all you've been through the last couple years." He leaned toward her. "But I can promise you that suicide is never the solution. It would be

wrong for you to take your life because God gave it to you. Even though you're older, whether you're going to be around for one, five or ten years, He still has a plan for you. He loves you so much, and He wants the rest of your life to be productive and joyful. You've been listening to the wrong voice, if that makes sense."

Sarah dabbed at her eyes with the tissue and shook her head no.

"Well, the devil hates you and he has a plan for your life—total destruction—misery and hopelessness on earth and an eternity in Hell after death—

"*Woo hoo*," shouted Misery.

– but God loves you, and He has a plan for your life on earth, and then for you to dwell in eternal Paradise with Him. He actually planned your life before He even created the world. You've been listening to the devil's lying voice, which will always lead to something evil. In this case, his lie says that you have no purpose for living and that you should take your own life.

"Don't listen," whispered Lying. "You don't have a purpose. You should be dead by now."

Did you grow up in church?"

"No."

"In that case, I'm going to start with some basics." May I read a few things?"

She nodded. *Why has this kind man come to see me today?*

"Before I get to the good news, I'm going to share some bad news. The Bible tells us that all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory.<sup>2</sup> I don't know anyone who is perfect, do you?" Sarah shook her head in agreement.

"This next Scripture tells us that the wages, or the result, of sin is death.<sup>3</sup> Death is eternal separation from a

loving God. But that's not what God wants; He wants relationship with all His children, including you. The Bible says that He's not willing that any should perish,<sup>4</sup> but that He came to give *everyone* eternal life.<sup>5</sup> Let me explain this a little more clearly.

"Nooooo. I can't take it," shrieked Depression, writhing.

"Because of God's holiness, He can't allow sin in His presence. Sin has to be paid for in order for us to be forgiven. Only then can we be in relationship with God.

"No, it's blasphemy. Don't listen. Don't listen," yelled Death.

"Only a person who is totally righteous can pay for sin. When a sinful human dies, his death doesn't pay for anything. Death is what he deserves. Remember, '*the wages of sin is death*'<sup>6</sup>? None of us has the ability to pay for our own sins. Because Jesus was sinless, when He voluntarily gave His life on the cross, it actually paid for everyone's sins.<sup>7</sup>

"Your sins are too bad to ever be forgiven," screeched Deception. It's all a lie."

"Accept His sacrifice for your sin and then, in gratitude for the free gift of salvation, dedicate your life to following Him every day. Then He will show you His wonderful, life-giving plans. Isn't that wonderful news?" he asked with a big smile. "What an incredible gift! He is the God who sacrificed Himself for you."

"I always thought we had to earn our way to Heaven by being good enough," said Sarah.

"No, we can't cancel the bad by doing good. Remember, sin has to be paid for. And we don't live good lives to earn God's love or to get Him to save us; we live good lives out of gratitude that He saved us as a free gift.

Plus, we now have His help to change those sinful habits that we used to be powerless over.”

As Sarah struggled to understand what all that meant, Malta appeared behind her and repeated what Pastor Hall had just spoken. The angels’ voices are not heard with earthly ears, but are apprehended by the human mind as a thought.

For the first time in her life, Sarah felt the weight of sin she was carrying. She realized that she needed forgiveness. Her strategy of trying to be a good person was woefully lacking compared to God’s standard of holiness. *It hasn’t worked for me so far.*

“Sarah, would you like to pray and acknowledge Jesus’ death as paying for all your sins?” Sarah nodded her head.

“Nooo,” screamed Depression. “She’s ours—” Sarah’s affirmation gave Joel the authority he needed to act on her behalf. With one slice of the double-edged sword he freed Sarah from the demonic torment that was trying to take her life and rob her of her destiny. The demons fled in terror.

Softly Sarah said, “Dear Jesus, thank You for dying for my sins so I wouldn’t have to. I give You what’s left of my life and ask You to show me what You want me to do.”

When Sarah prayed, although she had no way of knowing it, in the spiritual realm she was clothed in a brilliant, glowing white robe of righteousness. Embroidered in glistening white on the sleeves were Sarah’s spiritual gifts—prophecy (hearing from the Lord for other people) and intercession (fervent prayer).

“This is the same righteousness that Jesus has, as a free gift to you,” said Joel. “Now when Father looks at you, He sees Jesus’ righteousness, provided you continually ask forgiveness for your sins. It’s the most incredible exchange in the world! Your filthy rags of sin<sup>13</sup> are traded for the most costly, most valuable robe of righteousness.”

“And this,” said Malta, “is the mantle of humility.” He placed a drab brown-colored robe on her that totally covered her glowing white one.

“Next to the robe of righteousness, this is the most important garment. Don’t ever take it off, Sarah, or you’ll make yourself vulnerable to the enemy. Pride always goes before a fall,<sup>14</sup> but God gives grace to the humble.”<sup>15</sup>

“Our Lord was cloaked in humility when He walked the earth. His indescribable glory was temporarily hidden, and humility and love were two of His distinguishing characteristics.<sup>16</sup> Most Christians never come close to accomplishing what the Lord has for them because they won’t humble themselves,” said Joel. “Humility doesn’t get bestowed on you. It’s a joint venture. God grants you faith and grace as you, through diligent prayer and practice, fight a spiritual battle against your innate prideful desires. God won’t do your part, and you can’t do His.”

Pastor Hall continued, “Sarah, you have no idea how precious you are to the Lord. Did you know that the angels in Heaven are rejoicing right now over your decision?”<sup>18</sup>

“So are the angels right here,” said Malta as he played a celebratory song on his flute. Joel looked into the open Heaven, raised his hands toward the sky, and worshipped the Lord. “*You are worthy...because You were slain, and with Your blood You purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.*”<sup>19</sup>

These two angels would be with Sarah until her death. And although she was not aware of their presence, they would constantly guard and encourage her in the Lord.

Pastor Hall left and Sarah read the tract he had given her. One of the Scriptures was especially meaningful to her:

*The LORD your God is with you,  
he is mighty to save.  
He will take great delight in you,*

*he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing."*<sup>20</sup>

Sarah was more than a little confused about all that had happened, but she knew she felt immensely better. Her thoughts of suicide were totally gone, and she was able to sleep through the night. She left the house to grocery shop without fear, and she enjoyed eating again. Her strength was returning and she was able to revive most of her orchids.

She went to church that Sunday morning and made her public profession of faith, just like Pastor Hall had encouraged her to do. Two weeks later, she was baptized at age 71 and joined the over-60 Sunday school class. She gathered copies of all the free devotionals, tracts, and literature to take home and study.

Pastor Hall scheduled several meetings with Sarah to get her started on the right track. Sarah's primary spiritual gift, her true spiritual destiny, was intercession, which had lain dormant her entire life. Although Pastor Hall didn't realize this, the basic teachings that he gave her on prayer helped to get her started.

Sarah was seated across the mahogany desk with a pen and a notebook.

"Sarah, it's important that every Christian has a time of prayer with the Lord the first thing in the morning. Jesus is our model. The Scriptures tell us that He prayed often withdrew by Himself to pray.<sup>21</sup> He never acted independently of the Father, but stayed until He received instruction and strength for His daily plans. That's why Scripture says that Jesus only did what He saw the Father doing.<sup>22</sup> If Jesus needed to meet with the Father each day, how much more important is it for us?"

This was all new to Sarah, but she nodded her agreement at this sobering thought.

“Now maybe you didn’t know this, but the devil shows up at Christian’s prayer times too. He’ll do everything he can to distract and accuse you. You can’t let him derail you.” He saw a look of confused horror spread across Sarah’s face.

“Let me explain, Sarah. There’s the visible, tangible world around us that we can all see, like the furniture here and the trees and grass. However, overlaying this natural realm is a spiritual realm that few people can actually see, but it’s more real than the visible realm that is decaying and passing away. God is the creator of both realms. Remember the day I came to visit you? There were demons in the house that were assigned to take your life. When I walked in, my spirit sensed their presence. I started praying, and when you gave your life to the Lord they eventually left.”

“I didn’t exactly know they were demons,” she said, “but I know my whole house feels lighter.” She let out a deep sigh, “It sure feels like a burden has been lifted off me.”

“You were being oppressed by the dark side of the spirit world. Ephesians 6:12 says, *‘For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against...the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.’* That’s just another way of saying that the visible, tangible world and the people in it aren’t the real problem. It’s the spirits motivating them who are the problem.

“Ephesians 6:12,” said Sarah as she scribbled in her notebook.”

“One way we fight back is through prayer. Your prayers release spiritual power to defeat the enemy in the spiritual realm. Then you see the breakthrough in the natural realm. First in the spiritual, then in the natural.”

“Wow, I’ve got a lot to learn,” said Sarah. “I’d never even heard the stories you read from the Bible on Sunday.”

“Well, Sarah,” said Pastor Hall standing up, “It’s never too late to learn, and I commit that I will pray that you would grow exponentially in the things of the Lord and be a great hindrance to the devil’s kingdom. Even after I move, I’ll keep praying for you. And let me give you this book on humility. I give copies to every new believer. It’s a great way to start your Christian life. The Bible says that God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.<sup>23</sup> I want grace and grace and more grace in my life. The thought of God actively resisting me is terrifying.”

He shook her hand and Sarah managed to thank him, but she was so overwhelmed at his commitment to pray for her that she was crying by the time she got to her car. Just knowing that a seasoned Christian would be praying for her helped her feel less overwhelmed.

She read most of the book on humility that week and only missed having her prayer time one morning. The next week at their meeting, Sarah had more questions ready for Pastor Hall, especially about pride.

“Well,” said Pastor Hall, “I’m glad you’re interested. Most Christians don’t fight against pride or understand enough about humility to earnestly desire it. That’s a tragedy because if we humble ourselves, God promises to exalt us!<sup>24</sup> Pride is one of the most deadly forces at Satan’s disposal, and he uses it very effectively against us.”

“That’s exactly what the book said. It sounded like God takes these areas seriously,” said Sarah with her eyes wide. Pastor Hall chuckled.

“Yes, He does--very seriously.”

Sara, flipped to one of the dog-eared pages. “It says that ‘humility is the God-given confidence that does away with the need to prove to others how worthy you are, and the correctness of your actions. It gives the freedom to be who you were created by God to be, and to accomplish

what God has for you to do—because you completely agree with Him.”

“That’s a great definition! I totally agree. We need to perform before an audience of One,” he said pointing upward. Sarah nodded as that truth sunk in. “God has given each of us a different mix of spiritual and natural gifts. It’s humility when we accept what we are given and use these giftings as God planned. Don’t covet what other’s have. It will throw you off of God’s path for your life. You’ll only be judged on what God gave you and the specific purposes that He called you to do.”

“What do you mean, ‘I’ll be judged on what God gives me?’”

“When Christians die, their lives are judged and they are given rewards for their faithfulness or they ‘*suffer loss*’ for their lack of obedience.<sup>26</sup> They all get to Heaven, but the Bible speaks many times about eternal rewards and being faithful with what we’re given.<sup>27</sup> Develop your spiritual gifts. You entered the Kingdom late in life Sarah, so be diligent to give the Lord your time and your energy; make Him your priority above all distractions. When you get to Heaven and you really understand God’s great love for you and the amazing sacrifice He made for you, you’ll be grateful that you did.

“Do I really have spiritual gifts? I don’t know what they are.”

“Your spiritual gifts were picked especially for you by the Lord. You can understand your true destiny better when you function in your gifts. It helps you know who God created you to be and what He desires for you to do. There’s a list in the last chapter of the book I gave you. Go home and read it. Pray and see if the Lord highlights anything to you.”

At home Sarah read the descriptions of pastor/teacher, prophet, evangelist, apostle, administrator, leadership, faith, knowledge, wisdom, exhortation, discernment, ministering, service, giving, speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, miracles, healings, mercy, and hospitality.<sup>28</sup>

She faithfully prayed over the list. “I can’t wait to meet with Pastor Hall next week. I’ve got so much to learn.””

## Chapter 3

*“Do you wish to rise? Begin by descending. You plan a tower that will pierce the clouds? Lay first the foundation of humility.” Saint Augustine<sup>1</sup>*

Pastor Hall retired two months after their last meeting and he and his wife left Bradbury for Texas to care for his aged mother. But he was faithful to remember to pray for Sarah regularly.

The church board had called Paul Reynolds as interim to the little white chapel with the beautiful stained glass windows. With seminary graduation under his belt for less than a week, Paul had felt very grateful and relieved to be selected.

It was his first time preaching at Bradbury. Paul always started his sermons with a joke. “A woman calls her husband on his cell phone. He’s driving in his car; ‘Honey I want you to be very careful. I just heard on the radio that there’s someone driving the wrong way down Old Highway 3.’”

“One?” the husband replies, “There’s *hundreds* of them!”

The congregation roared with appreciative laughter. Paul let out a deep sigh of relief and ran his fingers through his perfectly coiffed, jet-black hair. At 6’2”, with a natural athletic build—wearing his best and only suit—he presented a good first impression.

*Maybe they’ll like me. Maybe they’ll call me as their pastor.*

“Relax,” said Saldu, to Paul’s spirit. Paul’s radiant guardian angel was standing in the pulpit directly behind him. “The service isn’t about you. It’s about glorifying your wonderful savior and Lord. Take your mind off your performance. Empty yourself and He’ll fill you. Then you’ll have truth and life to share.”

Shifting his weight from his left to his right foot and back again, like he always did when he had too much nervous energy, he began again, “I’m happy to be here today serving as your interim pastor. I’d like to introduce my better half. Kathy, will you stand please?” A petite brunette with curly hair, wearing a denim jumper, stood from the second row and gave the crowd a big smile and a wave.

“Jordan is 2 years old, and he is in the nursery. I speak for all of us when I say we look forward to getting to know all of you and serving with you here at the Victory Church of Bradbury, Missouri.”

*At least I’ll be employed until the search committee calls someone else.* At the very least, he hoped they would be committee-typical and take six months making up their minds. That would give him time to get something else lined up. He had student loans up to his eyebrows even though Kathy had worked until she was very pregnant with Jordan.

However, deep in his heart he was hoping to be the one, hoping to wow them with all the knowledge he'd gleaned from 89 graduate hours, not to mention his ability to read Hebrew and Greek. *God*, he silently prayed, *If this is Your will, I'd be so glad.*

At the back door shaking hands after the sermon, Paul tried every memory trick he knew to remember people's names. He pictured an outhouse floating in the ocean when he met John Seas. Angela Carver became an angel sculpting a big piece of cheese. Sarah Edwards was easy; her name was the same as the wife of his hero, the fiery evangelist, Jonathan Edwards.

For ten full minutes Paul basked in the adoration and compliments as the church members filed by shaking hands on the way to their Sunday dinners.

"Great sermon, pastor."

"I enjoyed that a lot."

"I never knew the meaning of that one word in Greek; that's very interesting."

If Kathy and Paul could have seen into the spirit world, they would have fainted at the sight of two tall, muscular angels with angular chiseled features accompanying them to their small Toyota. Valoe had long blond hair and Saldu, brown. Their glistening white robes were girded at the waist with a belt of truth. Their enormous gossamer wings were folded behind them. After being in the throne room from eternity past, they literally glowed with celestial resurrection power. Hael, Jordan's plump, jovial guardian angel, was waiting to get in the back next to Jordan's car seat. Valoe and Saldu would fly along beside the small car. Even though these guardians had been with them for years, neither Paul nor Kathy were aware of their presence.

The minute Kathy and Paul were in their car, before the key was even in the ignition, Paul turned to Kathy and asked, “Well?”

“Well, what?”

“What do you mean ‘well what’?” How’d I do? What did you hear from the people?”

Kathy rolled her eyes, “Just the same things you did when we were standing together in the back.”

“I know what they said, but what did they *really* think? Did they seem to like it? Did they follow along?”

“You did fine honey. The sermon was very good; you know it’s one of my favorites.”

“Were they nodding? What did their body language tell you?”

“Honey, I was sitting on the second row. All I could see was you!” She patted his shoulder. “Take a deep breath and relax; you did fine.”

“Kathy, I’ve got a good feeling about this,” he said, as he eased the car onto the blacktop road and back toward town. “I think this might be God. I can see us settling here. I can see Jordan growing up here. I can see me taking this church from 60 members to 300, and I know you think the parsonage is charming.”

“After the seminary dorm, living in a department store dressing room would be charming.”

“No, I’m serious; I think we have a future here. I have a good feeling about this. It has potential. It feels like it might fit.”

“Honey, I appreciate your enthusiasm, but you’ve got your cart way out before your horse. Relax and let God bring it about, if it’s even Him. If it’s not, He has something else. Just don’t force it.”

“Listen to your wife,” said Saldu. “Realize the magnitude of your heavenly Father’s love for you. If you humble yourself, you can get filled to overflowing with love and acceptance from Him every day. Now your insecurities cause you to crave affirmation from people. You’re looking in the wrong place.”

“Yes,” said Valoe, “God’s love truly satisfies. You could spill the excess over on Kathy and Jordan and the needy people around you. Instead you try to accumulate compliments to fill the bottomless dark pit in your soul. Without humility there can be no spiritual power, intimacy with God, or favor of God on your life.

Their 1993 Toyota stopped in the parsonage driveway. The engine died for a few seconds after the key turned off and finally sputtered to a stop. Kathy shook her head.

“This car! It won’t start when we want, and now it won’t stop either. Maybe it’s demon possessed.”

“Later this afternoon I’ll get some anointing oil or maybe some 10W40<sup>®</sup>,” said Paul chuckling, “and see if I can exorcise anything from the starter.” This caused Kathy to chuckle. She shook her head and then squeezed his arm.

Paul gathered Jordan out of the car seat and carried him up the cracked sidewalk, past the overgrown evergreen bushes, and to the front door of the small Tudor-style house. Brown paint was peeling off the wood trim and shutters.

“I can’t get this lock to open. I’m jiggling it like Mike told me to,” said Kathy.

“Here honey, let me,” he said, passing off Jordan to her arms. “Insert the key then pull it back just a little, then jiggle. See, it opens every time. Ah, home sweet home.”

“Home sweet *temporary* home,” she corrected. *Dear Lord, don’t let him get his heart set on anything that isn’t*

*You. He's 26 years old, and his diploma isn't even framed yet. We're at the beginning of the beginning of our ministry, and we need Your guidance.*

She bent over to let Jordan down and scanned the living room. Boxes of all sizes were strewn from one end to the other. She shook her head. *Where to even start?* “I guess I’ll heat lunch. Mike’s wife, Jessica, brought lasagna and salad last night. What a blessing. We can get started unpacking after we eat.”

After lunch, Kathy loaded the dirty dishes into the dishwasher and closed the harvest gold colored door. *I hope this works*, she thought. *Judging by the color, this dishwasher has to be at least 25 years old.*

After putting Jordan down for a nap she surveyed the mess: clothes, bedding, toys, pots, pans, and boxes of books. *How did we get so many books?* She moved a box off the couch and sighed the kind of deep sigh reserved for the challenges of moving. *It would have been nice*, she thought, *if the church had had the money to move us. Poor Paul. He worked so hard; he must have made 20 trips with our little Toyota and didn't complain once. I guess that's the bright side to not owning a lot of worldly goods.*

“Paul, lets unpack while Jordan is napping.” No answer. “Where are you?”

“I’m in my study, honey.”

Kathy walked down the hall, peeked in the door, and saw him sitting cross-legged on the floor writing in a spiral notebook.

“What are you doing? Why don’t you set up your desk?”

“Honey, I don’t have time. I’m inspired. I’m writing out a five-year plan for the church.”

“A five-year plan! You’re the interim pastor,” she said, throwing her arms in the air. “Besides, I need help unpacking.”

“Honey, you can put away the towels and hang the clothes, you know, the light stuff. Trust me, I think this is God.”

Kathy left the room shaking her head. In frustration she grabbed a towel and threw it toward the laundry basket. It passed through Valoe and hit its mark.

“She’s got a wicked curve ball. I’d hate to have to try and hit off her,” Valoe said as he grinned toward Saldu.

“You and me both,” Saldu replied.

“It never ceases to amaze me,” says Valoe, “why Father seems to call some of the most inconsiderate men to the ministry. They’ll drive across town in the middle of the night to comfort a parishioner, but won’t lift a finger to help their wives at home.”

“I guess He wants them in the ministry so He can keep a close eye on them. Who knows what they’d do unchecked?”

“Yes, unfortunately we’ve seen that a few times.”

“Well, Kathy’s got her hands full with Paul. Right now, let’s help her deal with the attitude that resulted in that wicked curve ball.”

## Chapter 4

*“One day, The Holy Spirit said to Bartleman ‘If you were only small enough, I could do anything with you.’ A great desire to be little, yeah, to be nothing came into my head.” Frank Bartleman<sup>1</sup>*

The telephone wires were on fire this Sunday afternoon. The trio of Wilma, Bernice, and Carol, three members from the lady’s over-60 Sunday school class, plus the spirits of Gossip and Slander, made sure of that. Not even in seminary was one of Paul’s sermons exposed to the scrutiny it received today.

Wilma pulled the handle that sent her recliner sprawling. “Getting a cell phone was the best thing I ever did,” she said to Oreo, the big black and white cat grooming himself on the area rug. She arranged her ample frame, comfortably fitted in a pink bathrobe and matching slippers, in the recliner, and with her left hand, she pushed her first auto dial button. With her right hand she picked up a cup of coffee from the end table.

Her ten pre-programmed numbers were like a prayer chain in reverse, a destructive gossip network that spread rumors at the speed of light. It resembled a multi-level marketing pyramid of friends phoning friends. It was so fast and efficient, that if it were Amway®, Wilma would have been a billionaire by now.

Bernice set down her watering can beside her African Violets displayed on her kitchen windowsill and grabbed the phone. “Hello.”

“Hi Bernice. It’s Wilma. What’d you think of the new interim today?” Before Bernice could answer, a thought popped in her head, *The mouths of fools are their ruin; their lips get them into trouble.*<sup>2</sup>

Bernice was so surprised by this thought that she didn't respond. *Is that a verse from Proverbs?* she wondered. After a few seconds, Wilma broke the silence.

"Well, frankly Bernice, I've heard better sermons. And what's with all that Greek mumbo jumbo?"

"Yes, the Greek, well that was, um, interesting."

"Interesting? I just thought that it was a big front he put up to try to impress us. He thinks we're all a bunch of small town hicks and don't know anything."

The term "small town hicks" was enough to play on Bernice's insecurities and suck her into the gossip session.

"I was pulling for him Wilma, but I just don't think he's gonna make it. He's got awfully big shoes to fill, awfully big shoes to fill. Pastor Hall's retirement is just so hard to accept."

Twenty minutes later Wilma sipped her coffee and punched speed dial button number two as the spirits of Slander and Faultfinding perched on her shoulder. Across town Carol hit the television remote's mute button, silencing the replay of her favorite soap opera. "Hello."

"Hi, Carol, its Wilma. What'd you think of Pastor Paul today?"

Ardare, Wilma's guardian angel, stood behind the plush gray recliner—eight feet tall and radiating with celestial light.

As he listened, his countenance disintegrated. "Oh, I can feel Father's heart breaking even now." Tears rolled down his cheeks. "Wilma, you have no idea. If you only knew how grievous this is to Father, you would never spread your poison."

As Wilma hit the third number a thought interrupted her, *As surely as a wind from the north brings rain, so a*

*gossiping tongue causes anger!*<sup>3</sup> She shifted her weight uncomfortably in the recliner.

Joan put down her knitting and picked up the phone, “Hello.”

Silence.

“Hello, hello, is anybody there?”

Wilma was distracted from Ardare’s thoughts by Joan. “Hello, Joan, it’s Wilma. How are you?”

“I’m fine Wilma. What’d you think of Pastor Paul today?”

Wilma haltingly began, “Um, well, I think, I think...”

“He’s got awfully big shoes to fill,” whispered Gossip.”

“I think He’s got awfully big shoes to fill,” repeated Wilma. “and I don’t know who he was trying to impress with all his high fallutin’ Greek words...”

Ardare continued bringing conviction to Wilma, and each time she made an effort to resist. Finally, she threw off his conviction totally for the pleasure of gossiping with her friends. By the time Wilma had hit auto dial number ten, she had no memory of the verse from Ardare.

Number ten was Sarah Edwards; she was not a close friend, not even really a friend, after all, that’s why she’s number ten, but she was a new Sunday school member. Wilma was on a roll; the recliner felt comfy, and the phone had been charging all night.

The phone rang at Sarah’s, but Sarah wasn’t answering. She’d had a call from Bernice after Bernice hung up from Wilma. Carol called too after chatting with Wilma, and so did speed dial numbers five and seven. She’d enjoyed talking with Carol; it was just nice to feel included, but something happened when she was talking to Bernice. She couldn’t get that verse out of her head:

*Telling lies about others is as harmful as hitting them with an ax, wounding them with a sword, or shooting them with a sharp arrow.<sup>4</sup> Those are all dangerous, destructive weapons, she thought.*

In her devotional yesterday she had read in the book of James that if a person can't control his tongue his religion is worthless.<sup>5</sup> She breathed a sigh of relief when the phone stopped ringing. She couldn't shake the sick feeling in her stomach. *Oh, God, help me. Help me to be a mature woman. I've got so much to learn. Please forgive me for gossiping just to fit in. Put a zipper on my big fat mouth.*

Malta looked at Joel and burst out laughing. Soon both angels were chuckling. "Prayers don't get any more sincere than that!" said Malta.

"Sarah," said Joel, "the Lord, in His mercy, is entrusting you with spiritual gifts, intercession for Pastor Paul and others. Instead of gossiping about him, now you'll be praying fervently. You'll even weep for him."

Sarah's gift of intercession was beginning with a burden for the new interim pastor and her local church, but before she departed for Heaven, it would encompass the world.

Sarah, still mulling over the meaning of the verse from Joel and Malta, repented again for her gossiping. *Forgive me, Lord. I've slandered Pastor Paul, and I don't know anything about him. He comes to our church the very first day, just out of seminary. The poor man; he must have been so nervous. I'm sure he wanted to do well. Lord bless Paul and his family. Bless his time here, whether short or long. Speak to him about his future and the church's.*

She continued praying, and when she glanced at the grandfather clock in the corner, 20 minutes had passed. *Maybe I am an intercessor, she thought. She smiled as she remembered the last meeting she had with Pastor Hall*

before he left. Sarah had her dog-eared humility book marked up with questions. She was so grateful that she'd had Pastor Hall to go to for answers.

"I've been studying about prayer, and I do like to pray."

"You could very well have a gift of intercession."

"But it's not even on the list of gifts."

"My opinion is that it's not on the list because every Christian is supposed to do it. It's like tithing; it's not on the list either." Sarah nodded. "My gift is as a pastor and a teacher; that's a very public gift. Intercession is a gift that comes with hiddenness. You'll be alone praying in your home for people you don't even know, and they will be touched by your prayers. You can pray for individuals; you can pray for war-torn nations. God is not limited by time or distance. Intercessors are the hidden workhorses of the Kingdom, but that's OK. God says He sees what we do in hiddenness, and He will reward us openly.<sup>6</sup>

"Can you explain something else about pride? The book said there is pride in my heart and that there is a demon of pride. That confused me."

"We get hit from the inside and the outside, don't we? We all struggle with certain internal areas; it could be temper, addiction, selfishness, pride, anything. These are in us and we are to actively fight against them. For instance, if I have greed in my heart I can bet that that demon will be trying to take advantage of me and make me stumble because it's a place of weakness. Remember last week we said that we don't fight against people, but against evil spirits?"

Sarah shook her head but remained quiet. "What's going on?" asked Pastor Hall leaning toward her. "It's just that I lived 71 years thinking that demons were like werewolves and monsters. It makes me so sad. I guess it's better to know the truth late, than never."

“Sarah, it’s no sin to be untaught, only unteachable. Remember, nobody can go back and start a new beginning, but anyone can start today and make a new ending.”

More revelation about prayer came the next day in the grocery store checkout line when she glanced at the cover of a woman’s magazine. The model looked about 14-years-old and wasn’t wearing much more than a sultry, come-hither look. *Dear Lord, what kind of parents would let their child pose like that?* She stopped; she hadn’t really meant it as a prayer so much as just a comment, but Joel whispered to her, “Pray for her, she’s anorexic. She’s 15-years-old, and the pressure she feels to look perfect and the shame from her anorexia causes her to cut herself.”

Sarah realized right then that she didn’t have to limit her prayers to people that she knew.

From then on she prayed for every model and movie star on every magazine cover at the grocery store, for every person on billboards or in advertisements, to be saved. She also prayed for whoever was at the receiving end of any siren she heard. While waiting for a train to pass, she prayed for each of the drifters who painted the graffiti on the speeding railway cars. *And God, don’t forget those who painted on the other side where I can’t see.* Once she even tuned in to the baseball game just so she could pray for the players.

Pastor Hall had also helped Sarah understand that what she’d called “her premonition” all her life was really a gift from God called prophecy. He gave her some scriptural examples<sup>7</sup> and explained the difference between someone who is a prophet, which is rare, and someone who has a prophetic gifting, like Sarah, which is much more common.

“The Lord will put words or an impression in your mind about what He’s thinking about another person. Prophetic ministry just means passing these words on to the

person God intended to hear them at a particular time. These words are to strengthen, encourage, and comfort.<sup>8</sup> God can speak in many ways, but most of the time it's just an impression. A thought comes to you that isn't yours. The apostle Paul said that we should earnestly desire spiritual gifts, but especially prophecy."<sup>9</sup>

At first Sarah was equally excited about her prophetic gifting, but after sharing some of her impressions with a few of her Sunday school class members and getting the cold shoulder, Sarah backed way off. She couldn't have known that they wouldn't receive a prophetic word from *anyone* who was a brand-new believer or a new member of their class. After all, many of them had attended that church for well over 30 years.

She continued getting impressions from the Lord about people, but after the chilly reception from her Sunday school classmates, and after reading in the Old Testament about how Joseph's family got angry with him for the same thing,<sup>10</sup> she decided that sharing her impressions would only get her in trouble. Joel and Malta encouraged Sarah to act on these words from the Lord, but with no results. They even tried to encourage receptivity among the members of the Sunday school class, but they had too much spiritual pride to listen to a new Christian.

To purchase a copy and see how this all ends go to [Jackiemacgirvin.com](http://Jackiemacgirvin.com)