





THERE'S AN EPIDEMIC IN THIS LAND

Visibly, it's an epidemic of hardened hearts toward the deep things of God, which results in *cold churches, impotent fathers, mediocre or shattered marriages, broken families, and hurting children. Spiritually it's a catastrophic misunderstanding of what our Lord's intention is for His people, starting with families and the men that oversee them.*

- **63%** of youth suicides are from fatherless homes [US dept. of health/census]
- **85%** of all children who show behavior disorders come from fatherless homes [Center for Disease Control]
- **71%** of all high school dropouts come from fatherless homes [Source: National Principals Association Report on the State of High Schools.]
- **43%** of US children live without their father [US Department of Census]
- **From 2005 to 2015, 27 of the deadliest mass shootings in America have been committed by young men. And as The Federalist's Peter Hasson noted in 2015, 26 of these 27 men grew up without a father.**

Between 40% and 70% of working police are divorced according to the Fellowship of Christian Police Officers website (FCPO)

40% of police are involved in domestic abuse (FCPO)

More police officers and first responders die by suicide than in the line of duty.

Thousands of veterans were reported as homeless each night (HUD report)

It is estimated that one military veteran commits suicide every hour of every day in the United States.

According to the WHO website, close to 800,000 people commit suicide every year. That means that one person kills themselves every forty seconds. *There are also indications that for each adult who died of suicide, there may have been more than twenty others who attempted to kill themselves.*

"Whoever says he abides in Him ought [as a personal debt] to walk and conduct himself in the same way in which He walked and conducted Himself," 1 John 2:6





The following fictional account is meant to portray the spirit and intent of the programming of the early morning hours of Praydio.com.

We call it the **Praydio Knights Network**, connecting the need with the Ministries in every city .

And we are their voice!

Our **Praydio Knights Network** is taking those in ministry on the front lines and connecting them with our powerful, nighttime world - wide radio programming. Equipped and manned by heros from all walks of life who have “been there” and with the Lord’s delivering power overcame what hindered them from living in the freedom God intended, the *Praydio Knights Network* is the vehicle that joins them together to reach those who need a lifeline to do the same.

The listener will have the opportunity to hear from people who live to see people’s hearts restored, when before they could only destroy relationships and shipwreck their own lives. You’ll hear from veterans who have dealt with the aftermath of war, former drug dealers, dopers, prostitutes and alcoholics, policemen who have overcome the pitfalls of their profession and would like more than anything to bridge the gap with the ones they’ve sworn to protect, first responders and how they’ve learned to cope, men and women who have turned their lives around to the point where their family has been restored. And that’s just the start!

Throughout the night, and reinforced with our daytime programming, *Praydio.com*, the *Praydio Knights Network* is the voice of individuals and ministries who are sold out to Jesus and digging in to help reverse the staggering statistics of fatherless children, lost and hopeless souls, shattered lives, and suicide victims.

We tell their story. We present their mission and share the wonder of what God is doing as they walk where He leads them. We broadcast and talk with those who need someone to listen, walk with those who are a steady, healing influence, and proclaim out loud the power of the cross.

In the dark of night, when all other programs, conferences, and meetings take a break—when there’s no one else there to share the listener’s pain, we’re available.

In the trenches with those who are called to help rebuild lives and reaching out to the lonely and broken in the dead of night, the *Praydio Knights Network* heralds the love of Jesus and the powerful, overcoming life that’s available to the listener through Him—no matter what’s happened, no matter where they are, no matter what the future holds. In Him, all things are possible!

Chapter 1

“Hello, Praydio Knights Network.”

The sound of a weak, hesitating, barely audible voice in Bubba’s radio headset told him that the caller was in trouble. Many years of living with and working to help heroin addicts, prostitutes beaten into submission, and other “street” people in great need, alerted his inner being. This was not just another caller who simply needed to talk about some trivial matter or boast of his or her opinion over the air. This was someone in desperate need. More than likely, time was an important factor.

Bubba could hear a rustling and noticed, peripherally, that the people around him had sensed the need also. Instinctively, the whole “bullpen,” (as it was affectionately known due to its similarity to the place where relief pitchers resided at a baseball game,) gathered around him. Just like a relief pitcher, each person was waiting to be called upon as the need arose, and everyone could sense the urgency that Bubba had as the “over-air” monitors relayed the same message to them.

“Lady,” a name that the diminutive blond woman working on the computer in the far corner had kept from her dark days as a biker’s “lady,” switched the computer to the pre-programmed phone link. The screen soon flashed the phone number of the caller, and moments later traced the number to its location.

“463 Elm Street,” Wolfman read aloud, his tall muscular frame stooped to look over her shoulder as he wrote the address on a scrap of paper. “We’re on it,” he said, grabbing his heavy winter parka as he moved toward Ray J. The two men raced toward the exit.

Once through the door, the athletic men attacked the path to their Jeep in the parking lot as slalom skiers would attack the side of a mountain slope. As he ran, Ray J. called, “Do the stuff that you do so well,” over his shoulder to Tinker, who had already called “911” and was relaying all known information to the police.

Bubba quickly perused the computer to make sure that everything was in order. Everything needed to be set properly so that others in the room could hear the events taking place and respond as things unfolded. Glancing to his right to set the computer on record, he silently prayed and began.

“Praydio Knights, how can I help you?” he spoke into the headset mic, making sure he sounded confident and calm. It was apparent that he needed to instill as much peace into the caller as possible.

“He’s...” the weak, almost childlike, voice hesitated. “He’s done it again.” The voice, now slurring noticeably, continued. “He’s beat me bad.” The voice of the caller trailed off in an almost sleepy fashion. Bubba’s trained ear could tell that the words spoken had come from someone in deep pain, and had been presented, more than likely, through greatly swollen and probably very bloodied lips.

“Is this Gina?” Bubba questioned, thinking he recognized the voice even in the caller’s present condition. “Gina?” he hesitantly inquired again after receiving no response.

Gina had been the unknown recipient of many prayers from the “bullpen;” and for that matter, from many of the listeners who had come to know her because of her frequent, early morning, “just to talk” calls. Each time, she shared more and more revealing glimpses of the weariness and desperation of her life. The property of her pimp, “Slice,” she expressed little hope for her future freedom.

Known on the street for his violent temper and little regard for the “pigs in his trough,” as he called them, “Slice” never let an opportunity to express his disdain for the girls go by. “Girls” were his hobby, almost a distraction from all of the other businesses that made him one of the most feared men on the street. Although he was a relatively “small fish” when considering major underground operations, in his own territory, one that he paid well to operate in, he was powerful enough to crush most locals who would try to function without him getting at least some of the action. Almost anyone who wanted to work outside of the conventional systems on his streets had to, in some way be connected to him. He had his fingers in most of the street enterprises, at least those that amounted to anything. His name explained his actions toward anyone who displeased him.

Most of the time, Slice would have enough people around him to accomplish any task that needed to be done. Sometimes, however, he took special delight in doing the work himself, especially when it came to women. Slice would use a small, double-edged razor knife, about one inch long, to give almost imperceptible, but very painful, puncture wounds to any girl he chose.

There were times, at random, when he would give several small wounds to a girl, (being careful not to disfigure her, which would cost him money,) just to show the others what would happen to them, should they defy him in any way. When he thought one of his girls had crossed him, or if he simply decided he could no longer use her, he took sadistic pleasure in using that same knife on her face, even removing portions of skin to permanently scar her and render her useless to any pimp, anywhere. In most cases, this meant a horrible, drawn-out death for the recipient. Scarred and unable to sell herself even for food - or more importantly to keep up her habit, because Slice made sure that all of his "pigs" became addicted - she would eventually be found lifeless in some dark place, nameless and forgotten.

Gina held a special place in Ray J. and Bubba's hearts. Often paired because they knew the street so well and had basically grown up in the inner-city area, they would patrol the streets as a visible counterpart to what was happening over the air.

The late night-early morning street people became familiar with the bright-colored step van which was outfitted with a small kitchen and refrigerator. In their travels, the two men would serve coffee, donuts, juice, and large doses of the love of Jesus to the lost, broken and hurting.

Gina would often sit, shivering from many hours on her corner, beneath a warm blanket they had provided, gratefully sipping hot coffee. She would silently listen, openly receptive to the love of God presented to her. In the dim, greenish cast of the van's interior lights, Bubba would often see tears flowing from the beautiful, but heavily painted, street-hardened face of this hopeless child.

Often, the men hoped that Gina would go with them to a safe haven in another city; but her fear of Slice and his constant threats made her too imprisoned to even think of fleeing from him. No assurance of safety or the emptiness of those threats could change her mind.

The two would be heartbroken as she shook off the words of comfort, took off the warm blanket and returned to the street. Visual memories of her helpless, "thanks for caring" smile of gratitude as she stepped from the van, setting her small foot encased only in open-toe, spike-heeled shoes on the snow-covered sidewalk, haunted both men. At times, the two would drive a short distance down the street to pray for her as she stood waiting for her next "john," shivering from the cold and looking very much like a small, grade school child performing in a school play in full costume. Each, however, knew that this was no play; it was real and, for that matter, only a matter of time before Gina, like most others, would eventually be in deep trouble.

As these memories flooded his mind, Bubba again spoke through the microphone. "Gina," he spoke quietly, "are you OK?"

After several moments there was a plaintive groan on the other side of the line, a thud, then silence, and eventually, a dial tone. "We're going to go to music for a few minutes, folks. Just keep praying. We'll keep you updated as we know more." Bubba spoke into the mic while looking to his left. Lady, who knew only too well what the sounds meant, had gotten up from the computer to await any directions from Bubba. As she stood there, her deep concern was evidenced as she bit the corner of her lip.

With those words, Bubba pushed "play" on the touch screen computer and music flooded the now very active room and thousands of radios, computers and cell phones in thousands of beautiful homes, cars, trucks and dark one-room hovels throughout the city and throughout the United States. "Did we get enough?" Bubba asked Lady as he removed his headphones, beads of sweat visible on his forehead.

"Well, we know where the caller is," Lady responded. "Whether or not we get someone there on time is another story," she continued, weighing the possibilities. "Ray J. and Wolfman are on their way," came as almost an afterthought as she hesitated at the full-length glass door of the control room, hoping the remark would be of comfort to Bubba.

A burst of cold air caught Ray J. and Wolfman by surprise and the driving sleet that accompanied it caused them to zip their heavy coats tight. "We'd better take your Spider," Ray J. said to his friend, who had already pulled his keys from his pocket. "Looks like the roads could be rough, and I don't think the plows have been through yet," he continued, his voice raised above the howling wind. Both men burrowed into their coats as they hurried toward the four-wheel drive vehicle.

It had been over six hours since Terry "Wolfman" Hill had pulled into the then freshly-plowed parking lot at the beginning of his several hour Radio Knights shift. Heavy snow, high winds and sleet, however, had made it very difficult to even see the currently snow-encased vehicle, much less get to it easily. The two men looked at each other as they approached the buried vehicle. Knowing each other's thoughts, they said in unison, "Lets have at it;" which simply meant, "We're not going to take the time or the trouble of digging and scraping - we're going to do only what is necessary, and drive over whatever's in our way."

Terry opened the driver's side door, grabbed the ice scraper and intending to throw it to Ray J. - who was stepping through a snowdrift past his knees - missed him, so he helplessly watched it fly past Ray J's head and bury itself in the large drift next to the four wheeler. "Sorry man," he said gingerly in response to the look imparted to him as Ray J. dug into the drift to retrieve it.

"We're going to have to talk about this someday," Ray J. said in feigned toughness, shaking the snow-covered tool toward his friend. A great gust of wind that blew frozen snow hard against Ray's face quelled any playfulness, and motivated him to vigorously attack the ice-covered windshield. As he was scraping, he heard the laborious grinding of the starter against the frozen flywheel. Through the now partially-cleared windshield, he could see the concern on the face of his friend. The interior light dimmed again, and then brightened as the frozen vehicle roared to life. A big smile covered Terry's deeply-lined face as he accented the moment of life with a double-fisted "yes" before unlocking the other front door. Ray J., having enough of cleaning and the cold in general, kicked aside some of the drifting that had occurred behind the car and then hopped into the passenger seat. The small attempt to kick aside some snow that had drifted higher than the lower edge of the door, seemed like more than enough of an effort to complete his task, in light of the circumstances.

Terry, who had been concentrating on the defroster and was about to get out to help Ray J. shovel, gave him a quizzical look, wondering how he got done so fast.

"What?" Ray J. responded to his unstated question. "You keep bragging about how this thing will go through anything. Well?" He held his hands out with his shoulders shrugged, a Cheshire cat glint in his eye.

Taking his cue and accepting the challenge, Terry slipped the Jeep Spider into reverse. Almost as if breaking loose from immovable bonds and with a crack that freed the brake pads from the rotors, the four wheels spun aggressively over and through the drifting snow to a relatively clear area. Taking a moment to give an "I told you so" grin toward Ray, who playfully wouldn't look in his direction, Terry dropped the throaty-sounding vehicle into drive.

As the powerful conveyance bounded over and through the inclement weather to the road, Ray J. took time from his task of adjusting the mobile, CB and police radios to give a well deserved, approving glance to Terry as they entered the snow-covered road. "We'd better hurry," he said, stating the obvious. "We'd better hurry," he said quietly, looking through the side window at the howling storm, seeing the dim reflection of his worried face looking back at him. "I hope we're in time."

Chapter 2

The blinding snow made travel increasingly difficult for the two men. Even with the use of amber foglights and a myriad of LED's across the front of the vehicle for better visibility, their movement was slow, testing the patience of both of them. All playful banter having ceased, each became the other's assistant in negotiating the treacherous elements. Several times, Ray J. found himself rolling down the window to stick his head out in a futile effort to see past the headlights and through the sheet of white that encompassed them.

Rolling up the window again, Ray J. gave a sheepish glance toward Wolfman, who was concentrating intently on the task of driving. He began to feel a little foolish about his impatience. "I'll never get used to this," he found himself saying to break tension, and the monotony of the sound of the windshield wipers, defroster and high-velocity winds.

"Relax, Ol' Buddy," Wolfman responded in an attempt to calm his friend. Deep in his own thoughts as they traveled the unplowed roads, he found himself flashing back and forth to previous times and was amazed that this point in time would trigger memories of times best forgotten.

The rose-colored dash lights, along with all the noises that he heard, somehow transported him from his present setting to the heavy challenges of war. As a machine gunner on an EVAC chopper, tense moments had become a part of his every day life and a part of most of his nightmares before he met the Lord. Blood, broken bodies and pieces of human flesh torn from their owners, being lifted on board were memories still real enough to touch; and moments like these triggered them.

"You're sweating man! Are you nervous?" Ray J. asked, noticing great beads of moisture forming on his friend's forehead defying the below zero temperatures.

Wolfman came back to the present time. "Been back on my second tour," he stated as he turned to Ray J. For a moment, the two friends' eyes met and transferred messages that both knew only too well. Having been in the place of being healed from memories, but sometimes still remembering their horror himself, Ray J. gave a knowing smile in response. In silence, both turned and looked through the blinding snow toward their destination.

The ice-encrusted, Brilliant white vehicle made new paths as it spun its way through the fresh snow. Its throaty dual exhaust and powerful engine almost defied the weather. Turning from 4th Street onto Elm, Wolfman and Ray J. simultaneously spotted the police and ambulance lights already at 463.

"Looks like Tinker got the job done," Ray J. said with a smile, referring to the "911" call that was always a part of any operation, as he noticed the man closing the back door on the paramedic vehicle, and hurriedly running to the driver's side door, almost falling on the ice as he did.

As the escorted ambulance pulled from the curb, its rear tandem tires spinning powerfully against the snow, a figure emerged through the blinding storm. High collar pressed against his face and leaning heavily into the wind, the man trudged from the steps of a building to Wolfman's vehicle as it pulled up to the curb behind police car #2614.

"Open up," the man yelled through the howling wind as he pointed to the rear door of the four-wheel drive vehicle. Wolfman pushed the release switch for the rear doors just as the man reached the ice-encrusted handle and gave it a powerful jerk. The door broke free of ice and the man quickly moved into the back seat, letting in as little of the cold and snow as he could before shutting the door.

Giving a shiver before taking off his heavy gloves and removing his hat, Tom Orsini, a twenty-year veteran of the police force, gave the two men a warm smile. "Wow, she's a rough one," Tom said, knowing he was stating the obvious. "You have much trouble getting here?"

Before Wolfman could say anything, Ray J. broke in. "We probably could have been here sooner if someone we both know hadn't been playing with the engine again, but we made it anyway." He eyed Wolfman, who just rolled his eyes, enjoying the continuing banter over their mutual love of cars, and simply relieved to have made their destination.

“What do we have?” Wolfman asked Tom, still looking at Ray J. with a smile.

“Well, we heard the show in our patrol car,” Tom began. “Bubba was right. It’s Gina. She’s cut up and beaten pretty badly. Somebody actually took some pieces from her face,” Tom continued quietly, lowering his head, and purposely not looking in the eyes of his friends. For several compassioned moments the three sat silently, deeply feeling the impact of what was said, watching Tom absentmindedly play with the seam of his heavy leather glove. It was all that he could do to hold back the tears. “You know, after twenty years I still can’t get used to this kind of stuff. What kind of mind. . .” He stopped.

The three men looked at each other knowing the kind of mind he was talking about, for each of them had that mind many years ago. In fact, Tom and Ray J. had been rival gang members on the streets. In times past they had met on numerous occasions to “war” with each other. Flashbacks of remembrances, such as the time that Ray J. saw Tom in his headlights, and purposely aimed for him as he drove headlong with his van into one of their meetings, “just for fun,” scattering men and women alike in every direction.

Tom often thanked God that none of the bullets that he fired at the escaping vehicle hit their mark, and to this day is amazed that no one was killed. Often they had talked of those times and marveled at the seething rage and uncontrolled blind anger that motivated each of them in contrast to the deep brotherly love that now joined them in combat for the Lord. Those former lifestyles took Ray J. to jail for armed robbery; and as Tom stated many times, it was “only by the grace of God” that he joined the police to help instead of hurt. Now, united in Jesus, they could only be thankful for the mercy that each of them had continuously been shown by the Lord.

“What can we do?” Wolfman broke through their unspoken thoughts.

“We could use some help following through to protect this little girl from further harm. We’re awful busy with this last terrorist scare. With the lockdown periodically in place we have a bunch more to deal with. It’s using up a lot of our men. We’re pretty short handed for this kind of stuff.” Tom stated while monitoring his radio.

“Do you know who did this?” Ray J. asked, knowing the answer. “Well, I think we all know whose work this is,” Tom began, referring to Slice, “And since he didn’t do a complete job - I mean, she’s still alive - I think she’s still in danger.”

“She’s going to St. Joe’s,” Tom finished, as he fastened his hat and opened the door.

As the door slammed shut, Tom braced himself once again against the bone-chilling cold, and walked to the front and knocked on the window. Wolfman pushed the button that broke the window free with a loud crack. Responding to the burst of icy air that invaded the now toasty warm compartment, he spoke loudly over the howling wind. “Take care, ol’ friend,” he told Tom, who patted him on the shoulder in friendly response.

“You, too,” Tom said quietly, almost to himself, moving toward his car and giving a wave over his shoulder.

The two men watched as Tom got in the squad car in front of them and pulled away. “What now?” Wolfman asked Ray J. as he picked up the mobile phone and began to dial the radio station.

“I think we had better make sure someone is with her from now on,” Ray J. said in response.

“Yo, Tinker, Wolfman here. . . Yeah, Bubba was right. Say. . .”

Ray J. peered out of the window as Wolfman gave Tinker their information and their thoughts on what to do next. The street looked pretty normal again once all the response vehicles had gone back to patrol. The only remaining car was the unmarked detective’s vehicle. Its occupants were futilely attempting to acquire some information from closed-mouth neighbors, who wore heavy coats over their pajamas and once again saw and heard nothing.

The big man lowered his head in quiet prayer, remembering the little child that was now disfigured for life. “Help her, Lord,” he whispered. “Help us to help her, if we can. She has no one; let her see You.” When he had finished his prayer, he noticed that his partner had completed the call and had been in prayer, too.

“It’s in His hands now, my friend; we just gotta keep on going,” Wolfman said as he pulled away from the curb.

Chapter 3

“Look, I already went through the file three times. We don’t have anyone here by the name of Gina, and if you don’t know her last name, I can’t help you. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I’ve got work to do.” With that, Nurse Ellington started to hang the clipboards that had been stacked on the desk from the latest rounds on their respective hooks just below the raised front portion of the reception counter.

Lady, who had come to St. Joe’s Hospital after only a few hours of sleep following her shift at the station, resolutely turned from the desk with a sigh of frustration, and started to walk toward the phones. “Boy, you’d think someone beat up that bad would have been noticed around here,” she commented, almost to herself.

“You looking for the whore?” Nurse Ellington called to her, looking up from her task. Lady stopped and turned. “I heard what you just said about someone being beaten up. Are you looking for the hooker that came in last night?”

Lady, somewhat tired and stressed-out from concern, almost lost her composure at the nurse’s pompous attitude. However, checking her fiery ability to respond and crush, and knowing it would be wisdom to avoid getting into anything, she responded kindly. “Yes. I’m looking for the woman you’ve described.”

“She’s a Jane Doe at the end of the hall on the third floor - Room 341,” the nurse stated curtly, pointing to the elevators. “She’s busier now than she was before she got what was coming to her,” she said sarcastically to herself, but loud enough so that Lady could hear.

“What do you mean?” Lady said as she hurried to the desk. “What do you mean?”

The nurse looked up. “I mean, one of her slimy friends is up there now. A real loser of a specimen; scary, you know. He took the elevator just about the time you came here to the desk.”

Lady’s eyes lit up as the thought of who it was hit her. She turned and ran toward the elevator, leaving nurse Ellington in disgust at the interruption of her normally uneventful evenings. “Slice!” she said to herself. As she got to the elevators and pushed the call button, she noticed that all of them were at the top floor. Anxiously looking up at the floor indicator that seemed stalled at the fourth floor, and pushing the button on the other elevators, Lady hit the wall in frustration. “No time.” she said looking for another route. “Gotta take the stairs.”

Taking two steps at a time for the four half flights and two landings, she passed a startled doctor who was reading some charts on his way to the operating room. Lady burst through the door on the third floor. Running past the surprised nurses at the station, her long scarf trailing her as she went, she pointed to the end of the hall and called, “341. Is it this way?”

“Why, yes,” one of the nurses said, as she came around the desk in time to see the small blonde break into a run. Several other nurses saw her too, and ran after her in hot pursuit.

“Forty-seven, forty-five, forty-three, forty-o...” Just as Lady was about to turn into Room 341, she ran headlong into Slice, who was hurriedly leaving, sending them both sprawling on the floor. Shocked and surprised, Slice groped on his hands and knees in an effort to get to his feet and escape via the stairs. Unfortunately for him, his slippery, leather-soled shoes impeded his progress.

Lady, who was thrown against the corridor wall before she also fell to the floor, started giving directions to the nurses as Slice, now on his feet, raced by. “Check Gina,” she said as she began to chase Slice back to the stairs. “And call the police,” she yelled as she ran after him.

She bounded through the stairway door as it was closing from the entry seconds before, and flew down the first half flight to the slab of concrete below - doing more jumping than running. Turning the corner, she negotiated the next half flight of stairs to the second floor landing. As she rounded the corner after the next half flight, everything suddenly went black before she reached the first floor landing.

Lady had the most peaceful sensation, almost like she was floating in the small pond in the back yard of her childhood. It seemed as if soothing water was being poured on her head, and warm moist towels were wrapped around her feet. Soon this reverie was intermittently exchanged with sharp pains in her face. Contradictions of feelings caused her to want to find out where she really was. She heard herself groan slightly and began to open her eyes.

“Hey! She’s coming around,” a familiar voice said off to her left.

“You OK, Baby?” said another voice that she recognized as her friend, Tinker’s.

Lady tried to focus on the concerned faces hovering over her as she started to regain an awareness of herself. “Where...” she hesitated because of a very dry throat, “Where am I?” she said swallowing painfully.

Holding her down gently as she remembered the pursuit and tried to get up, Tinker tried to soothe her. “It’s OK. Whoa, rest now. Everything’s fine.”

“How you doing, Hot Shot?” Bubba said jokingly, his big grin encompassing most of his face and seemingly filling the room. In fact, as Lady became more aware of her surroundings, all she could see were ear-to-ear smiles and grins from her friends. The pain seemed to cease completely.

“Boy, I don’t ever want to be anywhere except on your side,” Ray J. spoke, as all the others laughed. “You’re quite a sensation around here,” he continued. “Even the nurses are calling you a hero.”

Pretty much aware and remembering things now, Lady felt an urgency to know something. “How’s Gina?” she said intently.

“She’s fine,” Tinker responded quietly, patting her hand. “You saved her life.”

Still somewhat groggy and looking around at the hospital room and its occupants, including Gina who was heavily medicated and sleeping in the bed next to her, a myriad of questions filled Lady’s mind. As she raised her hand to her now throbbing head, she noticed her heavily bandaged wrist.

“What in the world happened?” she asked her friends. “The last thing I remember . . .” She stopped for a moment. “I remember chasing this guy. Slice?” Her friends nodded to confirm that they, too, thought it was Slice from the nurses’ description. “I was running down the stairs, turned the corner and . . .” Her voice trailed off. “Now I’m here. What happened in between?”

“We’ll try to fill in the blanks for you, Baby,” Tinker began. “We can’t tell you all that happened in the stairwell with you and this guy Slice, but we have some idea.”

“Looks like he was waiting for you as you turned the corner,” Ray J. continued the account. “He must have known you wouldn’t give up, so as he turned the corner before you, he probably just stopped and clocked you a good one when you arrived.”

“The nurses said that because of the way your nose is broken.”

Lady’s eyes opened wide in response, as she reached for her nose, only to be stopped gently by Tinker who continued, smiling and comforting her at the same time. “It must have been something quite hard, possibly his head or a shoe or even his fist. But he got you good. You probably fell backwards from the force of the blow and landed on the stone floor.”

“That’s probably how you got the concussion,” Ray J. interrupted, causing Lady to reach for her head with her left hand, touching the heavy bandage, and then slumping deeper into the pillow as the realization of all that was wrong with her sunk in.

“I must look like quite a sight,” she said.

“Well, you are quite colorful around your eyes,” Bubba broke in.

“What about my wrist? Why the big bandage?”

The room became very quiet. Bubba, who was still smiling from the last remark, instantly became sullen and turned away from the bed to face the wall.

“Come on, guys, what happened?”

“This guy is a real piece of work,” Ray J. started, looking down at the bed, absent-mindedly toying with the starched, white sheet. “It seems. . .” He looked up and into Lady’s eyes. Even though they were swollen badly, he noticed an intensity and obvious keen interest in them as he spoke. “It seems it wasn’t enough to have you unconscious. He wanted to finish you off.”

Lady looked down at her wrist. “He cut it pretty bad,” Bubba broke in. “He split the vein lengthwise; he didn’t just cut it quick. Can you imagine taking the time to slice something open that precisely in the midst of a pursuit, when you know that the whole hospital would soon be looking for you?” Bubba shook his head, then continued. “He did the same thing to Gina here after he pulled all her IV’s. If you guys both hadn’t already been in a hospital, they wouldn’t have been able to do anything to help. As it was, the surgeons have been quite busy repairing the damage.” Then in the same breath he said to himself, “This guy’s got to be stopped. We gotta help the police with any information we can find from our past contacts.”

Bubba walked toward the door. Almost as an afterthought he turned to Lady with a smile. “Don’t worry babe. We’ll find a safe place for your friend. No body’s going to hurt her any more.”

With that the big man walked out the door determined to do what he could to help.

Chapter 4

The Arizona winter sun felt warm on Charles' arm as he drove his new Cadillac down the dusty driveway. The iron-lettered heading over the gateway read "Goshen II," so he knew he was at the right farm, even though the surroundings and approaching out-buildings were not quite what he had envisioned for a meeting such as this one.

For many months now, the 6'11" all-pro wide receiver had been extremely uncomfortable with his part, or rather a lack of participation on his part in the needs around him. Football had been his obsession for as long as he could remember. Even as a young boy playing in the parks of Chicago, he knew that eventually he would end up playing pro ball. It was his only real goal in life.

Nothing ever had predominance over this obsession. His failed marriage of three years ago had proven that. Only since he'd given his life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ about one year after his marriage dissolved had life's priorities become somewhat more balanced.

Recently, he and his former wife began seeing each other again, and she marveled at how much he had changed. In his own heart, however, something was still out-of-order. An unsettled feeling constantly gnawed somewhere deep within him. Each time he would talk to someone deeply involved in God's work, or listen to the radio – "Praydio Knights" in particular - a growing knowledge of how little he was doing about the souls of others and his involvement in the needs of his nation haunted him. Things had changed in his land and now he knew he had to do something about it.

Bringing his car to a stop at the sidewalk that led to what seemed to be the main structure, Charles unfolded his long frame from the front seat. As he stretched to undo the effects of the long ride, he was startled by a voice that came from behind him.

"Hi, Mr. Washington."

Charles turned quickly to find a young boy who wore the biggest smile he had ever seen. "Hello, yourself," he responded. "How are you today?"

"Just fine. Been waitin' for you. Been waitin' all morning over there," the boy said, pointing to a bench near the door to the barn. "Can you sign my picture?" he continued, pulling a publicity photo of Charles from a manila envelope.

"I can do better than that," Charles told him as he moved to the trunk of the car, remembering the ball he'd carried to score the winning touchdown the previous weekend.

As he handed it to the boy, he exclaimed, "Wow, wait 'til Mom sees this!"

"Here. Let me sign it for you. What's your name?"

"Tommy," the boy replied.

As Charles began addressing the football, he noticed a few more things about Tommy. Besides the lack of hair, even eyebrows, Charles could see bruises covering his arms, probably from recent injections of some sort. Cancer was the first thought that came to his mind.

"Mom, look!" Tommy ran toward the approaching woman, who acknowledged her son's new treasure and took a moment to share in his excitement before she introduced herself.

"I'm Gloria Wheaton. You have no idea how excited Tommy was when he found out about your visit. You've been his hero for a long time now. Thank you for the ball."

"My pleasure." Charles bent down to Tommy again after shaking hands with his mother. "So you like football."

"You bet," Tommy responded enthusiastically. "When I grow up, after I'm better, I'm going to be just like you."

Charles gently took the ball he had signed, backed up a few steps and tossed an underhand ball to Tommy. He caught it sure-handedly and smiled broadly. "I bet you will, Tommy. I bet you will," Charles said with a grin on his face.

“Mr. Wilson is expecting you,” Gloria said. “He’s in the horse barn over there.” She pointed to where Tommy had been sitting. “He told me to tell you to meet him there.”

After a few more tosses, and more words of encouragement for Tommy, Charles headed for the barn while Tommy and his mom went toward the house.

“Could you tell me where I could find Jim Wilson?” Charles called to the man who was loading manure from one of the stalls into a wheeled cart.

“You must be Charles,” the man responded with a smile. Taking time to wipe his hands on well-worn jeans and extending a welcoming hand as he walked toward Charles, he continued cheerfully. “I’m Jim Wilson. Welcome.” Noticing the quizzical expression on Charles’ face, Jim said, “Let me guess what you’re thinking. Why would I be shoveling manure and meeting a pro football player who wants to talk about investing a large sum of money for the work of God at a barn instead of some office?” Charles smiled, acknowledging the accuracy of Jim’s statement. “Would you like a soda or some water?” Jim offered, as he walked to a refrigerator near the tack room.

Both men sipped gratefully at the cold bottles of spring water as they sat on the hay bales stacked near the barn entrance. Mutual feelings of kinship and trust developed as they shared their hearts and desires and prayed for God’s wisdom and direction. For about half an hour, both men simply learned more about the other’s life.

“This place,” Jim spoke, indicating the barn and, in particular, the manure cart, “allows me to pray and keep my perspective. I come here when things become too much for me. The Lord tenderly reminds me that it’s not about operating a ministry with its never-ending demands and details, as important as they are. It’s about living a life of integrity and doing my part to help others to have every opportunity to do the same. I see our lives vital to the needs of people all around us, addressing the new challenges in every community in this land. It’s about the souls of those who don’t know of God’s love for them and how much of a difference they can make. Jim stopped and looked at Charles a little sheepishly. “I’d better stop before I start preaching again. I have a habit of doing that,” he said, smiling.

Jim moved directly in front of Charles. “My friend,” he continued in wondrous awe of the Father God. “Many people come to me looking for answers during this time of change. Having been on the air with night-time programming for many years, I have seen the motivations of people change also. The real church is not sitting quietly in some building on Sunday listening to someone else give them pre-digested food. The real church is people in the cities and towns and neighborhoods who have sold out to their Lord and have made His cause their cause, knowing the times and seasons and desiring only to fulfill their part in His plans. All we do is give voice to their mission and encourage others to become involved where they are told by the Lord. It’s the Todd’s and Nancy’s in the recovery centers, or the Carols caring for people with no hope unless there’s a miracle - like Tommy. It’s the Marianne’s who touch broken kids through horses. They all run outreach programs. We just tell their stories, publicizing what they do and why they do it and give others the opportunity to help them. We help them directly, too, where needed.”

Jim stopped for a moment and walked, lost in thought, over to the stall he had been cleaning. Charles got off the hay bales and followed him. Jim picked up two shovels and handed one to Charles, who automatically began to load the cart. Both men worked for a few moments side-by-side, then Jim began again.

“We have a great opportunity to do something to help our cities and our nation during these troubled times. You and I are supposed to love deeper, and give more to help others because of the love we have received. There are so many who spend their nights reeling from the changing times and challenging economies. Our programming and resource information can help as no other can. In the times when people are most vulnerable we are there to encourage minister, reaching them anywhere they are.

Charles felt an urging from deep within; one that nothing had been able to stir before - not even football or the fame and money that came with it. Deep in thought, he began to shovel briskly. When the cart was full, Charles walked with Jim to the pile outside the rear of the barn.

“Jim, are you telling me that it’s part of God’s plan for everyone, especially those of us who are blessed financially, to give away much of what we earn to keep His work going by helping others through His love, even if it is everything?”

Jim gave the bottom of the cart a kick to empty the last remaining waste, then put the cart down for a moment. “Charles, you’ve studied the Bible, the life of Jesus, the book of Acts. Compare what it says to the present-day guidelines most of us have been told to live by and ask yourself - what is truth? What would Jesus do? When it’s all over and we’re standing before the Almighty Lord, what would you and I say about how we’ve spent or used whatever resources He has given us, no matter what form they’ve taken.”

Jim picked up the handle of the cart and both men started back to the barn. After several moments, Charles said, “How do I know what I’m supposed to do or where I’m supposed to get involved?”

“Well, I certainly can’t answer for you, but knowing that you’re one of the most respected players in football, I would think you could start by using your money and influence to assist some programs or people who want only to get involved. Use what you have to rally our listeners to unite to win our battles together whether they be spiritual or physical in nature. It is clear that everything is changing and good moral leaders can go a long way in helping unite this nation in this war. ”

“Look,” Jim continued, “I’ve never been given the gift of making large sums of money or a great talent, but I have been given the vision of radio programming sold out to the cause of God in this land.....

Chapter 5

“Nancy, would you set two more places for lunch?” Jim spoke over the phone to Nancy Osco. Nancy and her husband, Todd, worked with the recovering substance abuse users at the Teen Challenge Center at the north end of the farm. For many years, God had worked in their hearts and trained them to wait on Him for the fulfillment of their dream to help others like they themselves once were. Then in His perfect timing, the Lord raised up several businessmen through the network to build the facility on the farm and other businessmen to fulfill the daily needs, so that the desperate could be helped free-of-charge. None could afford it anyway because they were using all of their resources to supply their habit.

“I have to laugh,” Charles said to Jim as the two walked to the ‘79 pickup truck, its back end filled with bales of hay that hadn’t been unloaded yet. “Two weeks ago when you invited me here and said that we’d go to lunch, I had a different kind of lunch in mind. In fact, when you told me to allow about four or five hours for the meeting, I also had a different kind of meeting in mind.” Both men laughed, enjoying the Lord’s sense of humor.

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The twenty-nine men, ranging in age from seventeen to forty-six, sat around the large table that held basic, but bountiful food. Most of them could hardly believe that someone as famous as Charles was actually having lunch with them. Never in their wildest dreams would they have imagined such a close encounter. Charles, by the same token, was overwhelmed himself. Because Jim had asked several men to give their testimonies and others volunteered theirs, wanting to give glory to God; a new, deeper understanding of real strength and integrity was planted in Charles’ heart. After knowing and playing with the skilled and prosperous, the recovering strength and humble submission exhibited by these men spawned new life and desire in him.

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“I’ve been wrong. I have robbed from God,” Charles said, staring out of the windshield of the truck at the winding gravel road on their way back to the barn. “You know, I don’t feel condemned or anything like that, but I do know that I am going to have to make some changes. There’s a lot of thinking and praying to be done.

“I’m happy for you,” Jim responded. “It’s always a thrill to see people begin to respond to their callings, their real purpose for living as God designed it. We are a powerless church regarding our ability to really touch the lost because of our own self-indulgence and lack of desire to seek God for our true calling, no matter what the cost.”

“Those guys really touched me,” Charles confessed after several more moments of quiet. “I have a feeling that somehow I’ll be using what God has given me to help and encourage them or people like them,” he said thoughtfully.

“Since we’ve met, I’ve been doing some thinking myself,” Jim began. Charles looked at him with anticipation. “You’re from Chicago, aren’t you?” Charles confirmed his query with a nod. “Well, we’ve been praying about Chicago for a long time; whether or not God would want us to “open” that city with a radio station. It’s an extremely costly venture because of size, but maybe it’s about time to do it.”

“What do you mean?” Charles asked, becoming quite excited.

“There is a growing number of businessmen wanting to own a radio station so that we might supply programming for them through internet programming. That might be a possible avenue in which you could participate financially; and since it’s your home town, you would have an open door to many of the youth. That could be a way to use your notoriety and resources. Many ministries there could use your help. Perhaps you could talk to some of your fellow Christian player friends and spearhead a plan to help those who are already at work there. Just a thought.”

The two men drove to where Charles had parked in front of the main house. After saying farewell to Jim, Tommy, his mother and a small group of other kids who had gathered, Charles got in his car. "Get me the names of some of those men who are interested in the station, Jim, and I'll be in touch after I pray, OK?" he said before driving away.

Jim watched the now dust-covered Cadillac drive down the long, gravel road and through the entrance. He smiled as he imagined a group of angels hovering over the car of the man of God. "Protect him, Lord" Jim prayed. "He's about to enter into the real joy of his relationship with You." With that, Jim turned back to the barn, shovel in hand, to clean the next stall as he whistled a song of praise.

Chapter 6

The warming sun shone brilliantly against the newly fallen snow. Bubba had to shield his eyes from the ever-present glare as he walked along the frozen lakeshore. The blizzard of two nights ago had left about a foot of snow covering the ground, but the plows had been through soon afterward and the sidewalks had been cleared. The walk during the early morning hours was quite pleasant.

Throughout the night, the experience of tormenting anger over the recent events - Gina being hurt and the truly unjustified attempt on Lady's life - had left him unable to work, eat or sleep. He had called the Knights to fill in for him even though they were already shorthanded because Lady was in the hospital. He knew it was a great inconvenience for his on-air co-workers; but more important, he knew he couldn't minister over the air with the turmoil that festered within him.

"What's wrong, Lord? Am I losing my mind? I can't go on like this. I feel like I could kill, there's so much hate in me." It was all Bubba could do to hold himself back from searching out Slice and dealing with him the way he would have before the Lord took over his life. But that wasn't right and it would solve nothing. What, then, was the answer?

Bubba left the sidewalk and walked to a picnic table in the middle of the park. The snow was deep, but it felt good to puff a little as he trudged through it. Snow had accumulated on top of the table and drifted around the table to about the height of the seats. It took several swipes of his arm to remove the snow and make the seats available. Sitting on the cleared area of the table top, the large man rested his face in his hands and cried out to the Lord.

"Help me, Jesus. I need Your power to change me." After several minutes, a quiet peace enveloped him. The confusion that he had been feeling lifted, and the anger subsided, almost as if someone had physically removed a blanket from him. Recognizing the Lord's grace and knowing from experience that this meant that the Lord was about to answer his cry, Bubba sat still to listen.

"For a long time now, I have been attempting to capture your attention in order to teach you My true heart. You have been too busy, however, to spend enough time waiting on Me to hear what I have to say. Now, you see how far from Me your heart really is. Look how powerless you are to overcome the anger and hate that have been hidden deep within and covered by religious acts. Is it not reasonable that the world would not see Me in you that they might change and serve Me? My real power cannot rest on you because of these sins. Without Me truly being in charge of all the areas of your life, how can the spirit of the world be overcome? Do you not see? Can you not hear?"

"There is a call going out that is My call. It is a call of purification and dedication unto Me to become My cleansed bride. This bride will have My heart, My desires and My cause as the only purpose for her existence. She will walk in this world as I would walk: listening only to our Father and doing only His will, unto death if necessary, to show the world the ways of truth."

"I have asked you and many others to be a part of that bride. You have, however, misinterpreted My call. You have not given Me all of you."

"If I don't have all of you, your thoughts will be clouded by sin, just as they are now. In your hate, you cannot see My great love for a lost soul. In your anger, you cannot move in grace and mercy as I would for the salvation of someone who needs to see Me through you."

"Your hate is the same as his murder. You desire grace and mercy from Me, and at the same time give condemnation and judgment to him. How can that be My heart? Turn now. Repent, so that I might have all of you. I love you."

For a long time, Bubba sat with his head resting in his hands, weeping, repenting and thinking of the words the Lord had spoken to his heart. Remembrances of the past years at the station and the call to holiness and devotion that had daily been the theme over the air were brought to his mind. How often had he heard the words: "If you say you abide in Him, then you must walk and conduct yourself as He did," with his ears and missed the true meaning with his heart? How many times had he been told through the programming that time spent in true submission to the Lord was far more effective for change than the busyness of his religious works? How foolish he had been. How powerless was his life if he continued unchanged himself.

"Lord, I choose to love as You do," Bubba said out loud. "I choose to care more for the soul of Slice than I do for my own life. Show me how to do that, Lord." Bubba sat quietly for a moment, wiping the tears from his face.

Buttoning the top button of his coat and adjusting the knit cap over his ears, he got off the picnic table and walked back to the sidewalk through the deep, shimmering snow. "I'm going to give my life in prayer for Slice," he told his Lord. "That's what You would do, isn't it?" He felt an assurance in his heart that it was the beginning of what Jesus would do in this situation. Accompanying that assurance was the commitment to do whatever else needed to be done to please his Lord.

The cold wind no longer seemed to pierce through his parka as it had a little earlier; and although nothing in Bubba's surroundings had really changed, the sun seemed a little brighter, the snow-covered terrain was somewhat more beautiful and his steps seemed to take on a little bounce. Something had been placed in Bubba's heart, though; something that had been missing all the time he had known the Lord. It was there and growing stronger now. Deep in some spiritual place within him, sweetly, gently, and powerfully planted by his Lord; he now knew it would be OK. Somehow, he had taken on the responsibility to accomplish the Lord's work in his own life and in the lives of others; but now, it was different and he was free.

"They're going to be OK," he said out loud as he walked, giving a sigh of relief, releasing the people in his thoughts back to the Lord at the same time. He knew in his heart that Lady would heal and that Gina would be watched closely and protected while in the hospital. He already had in mind a safe haven in another state where she could see Jesus' love in action and have ample opportunities to accept Him as Lord of her life.

"I choose to love Slice as Jesus did, My Father," he continued, "only by Your power, but I choose that he and others like him see the crucified Christ in Me." He had said it before on the picnic table, but he needed to say it again. "Love them through me and the rest of the Knights, Lord. Give us what is needed so that others might see."

Bubba walked unhurriedly in grateful fellowship with his Lord, his Master, his only Hope. "It's all going to be OK, isn't it, Lord? No matter what You choose as an outcome, I submit to it and to Your Word. Thank You, Lord. Thank You, Lord!"