

## **My Struggle to Obey God!**

We are seeking to reestablish our public ministry in Pilot Mountain, NC. Our mission statement can be found on this page of our website, Blog site [www.impactourcity.com](http://www.impactourcity.com) I also have 2 ministry sites [www.restoringtheman.com](http://www.restoringtheman.com) and [www.restorepilotmountain.com](http://www.restorepilotmountain.com)

To answer the question “who are you Jonathan Keener?” I have made a serious effort to compile this account as comprehensively as time has allowed. At the writing of this account, my wife, Sharon, and I have eight children. We live right in the middle of the town of Pilot Mountain at 200 Old Westfield Rd. I am 59 years old and my wife is 54 years old. Our oldest child is Jenna, age 31, 2<sup>nd</sup> is Rebecca, age 29, 3<sup>rd</sup> oldest is Makayla, age 25, married to Joshua Varrie, our oldest son is Seth, age 22, 2<sup>nd</sup> is Matthew, age 19, 3<sup>rd</sup> oldest is Stephen, age 18, and our youngest boy is Zachariah, age 16, the Lord added is little girl, Zoe Hannah Grace in 2011, she is age 12.

The wonderful and always encouraging reality of my life is that all our children are very healthy and active, they are obedient, and they have many gifts; we are so blessed to be called their parents.

For the last few years we have been praying about connecting with a financial support partner to reestablish the God-sent and beautiful vision of Livin Lattes Café. Over the course of time we have brought this vision before several different ministries that share our heart to break down the strongholds of religion in Postmodern America to fulfill the Great Commission.

We are certain that a “new” wine and a “new” wineskin are required to obey Christ’s call to “make” disciples of the nations. If we respond to God’s call to gather His People together in one accord and wait for the His Spirit to come into our midst; the Lord promises to come and fill us with His Love for each other and for the lost folks we see and do life with each day.

The LLI Fellowship church planting model can operate in a communist, monarchist, totalitarian, or a democratic nation; the Gospel of Jesus Christ has dominion over all rulers and nations. We believe that a major shift and reordering of nations is coming to our world very soon. A one-world government will eventually rise into power as all biblical prophecies indicate. Whether we are a publicly seen church operating in the marketplace or an underground church, it doesn’t matter, the cell church and the café church would be effective anywhere in the world.

The following is an account of how we landed in Pilot Mountain and why we believe so strongly that Livin Lattes is a God-ordained and timely ministry to reach our nation. We continually submit His work to the Holy Spirit and His government!

## **My Early Years**

I was raised in a home with Calvinist and Reformed theological beliefs; I would not call it high church but somewhere between high church and your typical Bible church. We preached a high view of God and His power to save sinners; my father and our church did not preach a seeker friendly message, they proclaimed the necessity of a holy life and devotion to Christ as a sign of the new birth. Our family lived for most of my early childhood on a beautiful dairy farm just south of Allentown, PA. I was the oldest and only boy of five children.

I experienced in every way an ideal childhood on this dairy farm. My time on this farm was technology free. Most of my days on the farm were spent in a God-fearing home, I played almost everyday in the nearby woods and creek, and anxiously would beg my father to sit on the wheel well of the black smoke puffing Oliver tractor my dad loved to take to the fields.

Every day I had the privilege to gaze upon the pastures of Northampton County PA. Our house was surrounded by lush pasturelands dotted with one of the finest registered Holstein herds in the country. From the earliest days of my life on this beautiful dairy farm, I had a distinct fear of God and a strong desire to please Him with my whole heart.

My father and mother, Harold and Susanne Keener gave me the absolute best spiritual training they could.

I heard many passionate gospel presentations at our church. My father was an elder in the Calvinistic Baptist church we attended in Allentown, PA. We drove about ½ hour to church every Sunday and on Wednesday nights. I did not like the ride, it was too long. But for the most part I was taught the basics of faith in Christ. My father was going through a metamorphosis in his doctrinal beliefs. He was always discussing the finer points of Calvinism versus Arminianism.

Even our extended family gatherings were riddled with arguments over doctrine. In spite of his view on God's sovereignty in the salvation of sinners, my father had a heart for lost sinners. He would preach a mission in downtown Allentown on Sunday afternoons. I would go with my father many times and see all types of sinners visiting this mission to get a bite of food and hopefully find a place to lay their head.

I believe that I gave my heart to Christ at the age of 7 or 8, I don't remember how old I was but I do remember the night that a man, Jack Lindsey, came to preach a message. The message was about how sin can never be covered up with more sin and that more sin leads only to death! He spoke of Hell and I was genuinely scared of dying and wanted desperately to know that I would never go to this horrible place! My dad comforted me with the promises of God at the foot of the cross and I clung as much as I could to this word of promise, believing that God would save me. During this period of my early childhood I did not so much as want or have a bad thought enter my mind, God's spirit was working deep in my life!

At the age of twelve our family left Northampton County, PA and our wonderful countryside setting to start dairy farming on our own. This move fulfilled a dream that my dad held for most of his life, but for me, this move was to rock my world and ruin the comforts of my well situated life in the Allentown area. My dad wanted to milk cows. My father's decision came out of his ancestral roots. The Keener family came to the USA in 1840. They came from an area in Germany called Bavaria. They were Mennonite in their faith practice. Most of the men in the family were farmers and preachers of the Gospel message. So my dad was just flowing in his destiny as a Keener male but I did not understand all this at the time.

These Kuhner's, the Keener's German name, came to America to worship God in William Penn's Pennsylvania, particularly the Lancaster county area. Upon arriving in America, the first Kuhner who arrived, Henry, changed their surname to "Keener" to make it easier for people to pronounce and write. I personally have a suspicion that they had some connection to the Jewish heritage, but have yet to prove this as fact. Many Germans who changed their name when they arrived in America had Jewish roots.

## My Hard Teenage Years

The very first year of my teenage life was riddled with tension and family struggle. My internal tension increased as my mother fought this inevitable move from our nice and comfortable setting on the dairy farm in Northampton County PA, to his very own dairy farm. My dad would take any deal where he could secure the financing to pull it off.

For most of his life my dad had dreamed about owning his very own dairy farm. I remember hearing him talk of the black dirt of Iowa and all the beautiful farms in Wisconsin and Minnesota. My mom wanted our family to stay together and not move too far away from her siblings in Lancaster, PA. My mom was very close with her family. She was the 5<sup>th</sup> child in a family of ten kids. She adored her father and strove to be as efficient and proficient as her godly mother. After ten years as herdsman on Siep's Dairy Farm in Easton, PA, my father found a place and the deal that would give him that chance to operate his own farm. The farm was about hour away from where we lived, we would lease the farm and equipment and he secured a FHA loan sufficient enough to buy the about 50 registered black and white Holsteins, some of which were registered and some were grades, we also purchased a couple of tractors, a plow, corn and rye planters, and other necessary implements to operate a working dairy farm.

My mother was not included in this process of deciding the factors that played into this decision to farm on our own. I was now entering my teenage years and could manage a larger work load. The decision to keep her out of the decision making process, would prove to be a big step back in their relationship as husband and wife. I had a first row seat to the eventual dysfunction as my mom and dad slowly drifted apart. My father's decision to go around my mom's fears by side-stepping her involvement, set our family on a course that created an environment that would have a deep impact on my life.

My dad's choice to share the details of his dream with me and not my mother would cause a rift in my family that would carry on for many years. As we drove to see this dairy farm, my father and I discussed with excitement the possibility of farming together. After we walked through the barn, milk house, and climbed up the two 60ft silos, I remember standing in the driveway of this new place and asking my dad this very real question, "does mom know you are wanting to do this?" I remember the grin of embarrassment on his face when he told me a sheepish "no".

So my dad paved ahead where even angels dare to tread, and off we moved to our new place in Montgomery County, PA. The farm was placed on 75 acres of average dirt with bad drainage, the farm house was large enough to house our family and an apartment for additional rental income for our landlord.

Our landlord rented out the other side of the house and our family of seven lived quite compactly in the main part of the old home. The farm lacked the quality soil that my dad was accustomed to tiling and working back in Northampton County. But he was very resourceful and full of positive energy to make it all work. The first three years we operated this farm he turned a profit. My dad had a knack for buying quality cows at a low price. He and I continued to enjoy the work of breeding our cows to high quality sires. This work would pay off locally, where year by year our family would win many prizes at our local county registered dairy cow show, the highlight of every summer.

I still missed the wonderful setting of Northampton County, where I had plenty of friends, and back there I was a good student and very successful athlete on the baseball diamond. More or less a big fish in a small

pond. Once our family moved away from Northampton County I struggled for about five years to find a true friend and I would lose my love for books.

In my struggle to find my athletic identity, I discovered the sport of wrestling. My first real wrestling coach made a great impression on me. He was also my Social Studies teacher, Mr. Lukridge, a young vibrant man fresh out of college, full of energy, many college prank stories to share in class, and many jokes that kept our team and his classes in rapt attention. His style of coaching was a perfect fit for my personality. Not only was he good at teaching technique, he also was very good at motivating his wrestlers to do their very best.

As I grew I realized that I had problems accepting success, or walking in success. I had an inherent belief that I was good at things but I seemed to walk and live outside my destiny most of the time. I seemed like a person who was unable to truly reach his potential, so I was a very frustrating person to coach and teach. Any positive success I had earlier on the baseball diamond would give way to focusing more on my wrestling career as my body stayed stuck in a preadolescent state. As the competition stiffened in my wrestling world, my ability to match the physical stamina and mental toughness required to take me to the highest point of my potential seemed elusive.

Meanwhile back on the farm, my father hoped that he could teach me how to run a dairy farm with the hope that one day we could farm together. From age 13 to 17, I was in this pressure cooker of my dad wanting me to become a farmer and me searching to find myself as an athlete. This nagging tension inside my heart that resisted the way of the farm and an elusive grab for all the potential I had as an athlete. Spiritually, my heart was torn, my mom was wanting me to succeed in sports and in academics while my dad wanted me to focus on farming.

I watched my father work at least 100 hours every week over his ten years of operating this farm, he had one 4-day vacation over that period. My father is a worker, his example as a man who labors hard has stayed with me. Though he worked so hard, he just could not get ahead of the policies that our government was putting in place to help farmers.

The Nixon / Ford administration and the Carter administration would not increase dairy exports. The American farmer put himself out of work by improving production. With the increase in knowledge within the field of nutrition that produced more milk per head combined with better breeding of Holsteins, the American dairy farmer created an overabundant milk supply which drove down the price of milk and drove down our profits. Instead of allowing our abundance to be shared with the world market in an effort to increase demand, our government chose to encourage dairy farmers to cull their cows (turn them into beef cows) and find other work. As of today, the only real successful dairy farmers are the ones who have built industrial type milk factories, the wonderful family run farms that established the art of making milk have all but vanished from the American landscape.

The part of farming that interested me the most was the art of breeding better, more functional cows. For me, the quest to breed a Holstein that was better looking and that produced more milk with high butterfat content was a lot of fun. The science of dairy farming was very interesting to my mind, but the mundane aspects of farming like driving a tractor back and forth in a field inspired no interest.

Our church life changed much during this time. Our new environment was dominated by Mennonite and Brethren churches. We lived within 45 minutes of Philadelphia and within this area were two very well

known seminaries, Biblical Seminary in Hatfield, PA and Westminster Seminary in Abington, PA. These seminaries taught the doctrines of the early American church. The writings of John Owen, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards,, and the preaching ministries of George Whitfield and Charles Spurgeon were in a time of renaissance. Men came from all over the country to get this fresh teaching and many of them attended a church that was just beginning to add congregants near to our farm.

Conflict over doctrine was a big part of church life. A high view of God was established by the pastor who preached most of the sermons that I remember hearing in my early teens. This pastor was also very passionate about winning souls. I remember him weeping for men and women to come to Christ. I enjoyed his preaching, but I did not enjoy the preaching of many of the other seminary types that would share the pulpit with him. This man was a very personable man of God. I did not realize until many years later how “good” a man of God he was to me, those early teenage years. His preaching kept me from losing all hope and giving way to discouragement.

To summarize this period of my life I would say it was very tense in our church and in my home. Most of my life all I have really known of church life and in my home setting has been conflict and argument over doctrine and decisions about direction and truths on how to operate as a family or ministry under God’s control.

My mom’s best observation of my father during these years of our struggle to find the “truth” was her assessment that my dad, after discovering the doctrines of Grace (Teachings of Calvinism), my dad went into a time of deep soul searching to discover the depths of his personal depravity. This internal search led to a more sad and solemn view of God’s grace. The doctrine of “total depravity” was his constant meditation, realizing that he and all men are totally “dead” in their trespasses and sins, he seemed to lose his evangelistic zeal to speak boldly the word of God during these years. I would say that my dad never really discovered the joy of his salvation. As of today August 2021 he has recovered to realize some joy of his salvation due to close encounters with death.

I attributed my father’s struggle to walk in victory to a spirit of religion that brought with it a very real emotional depression that kept him from finding his identity in Christ and to discover personally the power in His resurrection to be then be the man of God walking in the fear and love of the Father. Instead of the apostle Paul and Peter, we put on a pedestal preachers like Charles Spurgeon, Jonathan Edwards, and modern day great preachers like my uncle Albert Martin and many others.

At this point my father and mother drifted apart in their marriage, many times of their arguments had to do with me and how I should be guided to find my way in life. My mom desired for me a full exposure to all kinds of activities and learning, but most especially sports! I was a natural athlete and she loved sports. She loved to watch me play baseball and wrestle. But the reality was my father needed a lot of help to keep the farm going, deep down I knew I could not satisfy the two different pulls of affection on my heart. Eventually I wore out on their struggle and lost interest in pursuing anything big or noteworthy in my life. I resented being used as a pawn in my parent’s arguments; I recall a real rivalry between my dad and me over winning my mom’s affection.

To add to the mental and emotional confusion, my body was not growing! My mom thought I was not growing because in junior high I cut weight for wrestling. I would starve myself to make the 85 pound weight class. I went undefeated my eighth grade year, but my body stopped developing! At age 16, I was

about 5'-1" and weighed about 112 pounds, in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade I tried to wrestle 98 pounds. My best friend also wrestled in this weight class. He had been wrestling since he was very young. He knew how to win, he would beat me every time we wrestled for the 98 lb weight class as I tried to win this treasured spot on our varsity team. The matches were close but I would fall short in the end. After losing to him I wrestled up to 105, where I struggled to beat several comers. I should have been a very successful high school wrestler, but because of my lack of physical emotional maturity and having to face one of the toughest wrestlers in the state everyday at my weight class, all this led me to have a very lackluster high school wrestling career!

Finally in the summer leading up to the 12<sup>th</sup> grade I began to grow and gain some confidence. I remember going to a summer wrestling camp and almost finding myself. I started to wrestle with freedom and confidence. But once wrestling season came around my body and mind were going through things that most junior high kids go through and I was a senior in high school. To put it bluntly, I was an emotional mess. Waiting for God to turn my puberty button on at age 17 was about the hardest thing a boy can deal with, especially if he is an aspiring college athlete. I was so broke inside even to the point of being suicidal. My dream as a young boy was to be a professional athlete, but my body did not cooperate with that dream! I was angry at God for letting this happen to me, I was depressed, if it wasn't for my mom I don't know what kind of substances I would be addicted to today!

During this time God held me in His Arms, looking back, I know if He didn't hold me, I would have fallen deep into sin. My anger at God might have been manifested in ways that could have landed me in jail. I had a lot of bottled up anger and if I were to release that anger on certain people and even myself I do not know what would happen. All I know is that God was always restraining me from falling all the way into sin! I was blessed by Him to get through this time without dying or being addicted to drugs and alcohol. I remember so many times in the shower crying out to God pleading with Him to move on me, I would constantly beg him by saying, *"when are you going to come and help me?"* I truly, in every way, felt abandoned by God at this time in my life.

My father was also going through his time of depression. In our first three years of operation my dad's dairy farm was one of the best in the county for milk production and our cows were winning awards at the county fair! My father was making profits those first three years but this season would not last. After these good years we experienced a year of drought while our government was playing games with the price of milk. With milk prices going down and no rain on our crops, we were headed for disaster. At one point my dad was so depressed that he would not speak at the dinner table. His depression seemed to go on for about two years!

My dad was very faithful in leading our family in prayer and Bible reading for most of my early childhood. We were the kind of Christian family that had daily devotions and times of prayer after dinner, but during the years operating our own dairy business, our prayer times seemed to stop. My mom prayed with us individually, but as a family we did not come together as we had in the past. One day at the dinner table I told my dad during this time of trial and drought, my dad was hanging his head down in despair, I asked my father the most genuine of questions, *"why don't you trust God to send the rain?"* I continued by begging him with these words, *"why don't you just believe God?"*

I don't remember his answer but I do remember what happened inside of me. It was like a settled dissatisfaction began to percolate inside my heart, I did not want to be a part of a sad and faithless tale. My four sisters were just as frustrated and confused as I was, I wanted them to believe in a God who could

do miracles. I felt a burden for them and wanted to show them that God was going to take care of us, somehow and some way. In order to fill this faith void in our family, at age 17 I started to assume the spiritual headship of the home. My sisters were my life and I was proud of them. They were pretty and they were athletic. I enjoyed playing sports with them and watching their games. We would go out together and do all kinds of fun stuff together. They enjoyed having a big brother that looked out for them and made sure they were OK.

This role of being an “encourager” would stay with me for the rest of my life. During my senior year of High School, our FCA program grew in number and spiritual depth. Kids were getting saved and we were having good times of fellowship together. We started gathering some of our growing group to our farm to have fun and play games.

While things were turning around in my social life I discovered the taste of beer through a cousin who came the summer leading up to my senior year of high school. My uncle Dick who lived in California, came for a visit to see his family. My mom was one of his favorite sisters. He brought his son to our farm to hang out with us and allow my mom and dad to go away for a few days together. My cousin Rick who just turned 15, looked like he was old enough to buy beer and sure enough he did and we drank beer in our hay loft until it tasted good enough to consume quarts at a time.

My sister, Linea was exposed to some of this crazy stuff along with her and my cousin Bonny. This was a dark time for me and my sister. Fortunately God showed us mercy, through my grandfather, George Martin, who was instrumental to unfold the entire situation with my cousin Rick. My sins were found out and my Pop Pop Martin drove out to our farm to put me back in line. He told me of his disappointment in my behavior as a young man and how my behavior had negatively affected his hopes that Rick would begin to turn his life around and give his heart to the Lord.

I did not repent right away, but my grandfather’s words would linger in my head and heart for several years. Once I got my license to drive I became a wild man behind the wheel. Combine crazy driving with drinking and you have a recipe with death. I could not tell you how many times I felt like angels were guiding my car from hitting cars or trees head-on. During this time I tempted God, I started to act like I was invincible and unkillable. I even tempted God to take me out of the messes in my life. Fortunately the God of heaven and earth had much mercy on my foolishness.

## **My Rediscovery of God’s Love**

By the time I reached 19 years old I wanted out of the house and off the farm. I also was searching for the truth. Based on the unbelief and unrest I had experienced at home, I lost the simple faith in the God I had maintained in my early childhood in Easton, PA. Oftentimes I would complain to God, through my times of darkness and doubt, but God had mercy on me. He preserved me from taking my own life, for this I will always be thankful! I was baptized by our local Reformed Baptist Church at the age of 17 but I do not believe that this was the moment of my actual salvation.

As a child I was so sensitive to Spirit and anointed preaching of Christ’s love that I would repent every time I heard of judgment, heaven and hell. As a little boy I do believe the Lord called me to preach his word, as I grew older I became less and less interested in being a full time preacher. Because I did not read and study the Word as I ought, by the time I reached the age of 19 I knew I lacked the knowledge to be the man of God I wanted to be. I did not experience any kind of personal call by the Lord Jesus to serve Him as a

minister of Gospel. At this time my doctrine and my wrong understanding of God's heart for sinners kept me from chasing after the lost. I thought if God wanted to save people He would take care of it, I did not feel a deep responsibility to share Christ with sinners.

After a very low key and uneventful graduation from Souderton High School, I headed off to my first year of college. I have wanted to attend Penn State University ever since I was a little kid. I loved Penn State's football team so much, my uncle Dave was a Chaplain for their team during the years of Matt Millan, Bruce Clark, and through the glory days of one of Penn State's best running backs Curt Warner.

One time during a visit to Penn State in my earlier teens, I met Matt Millan personally, I could not even speak to him I was so starstruck. I was not able to go to the Main Campus because of my lousy grades in High School. I was capable of much more academically but I did not care one lick about my studies in High School. My grades forced me to look at a branch campus that fit my major, "dairy science". We chose the branch campus located in Mont Alto, PA. This campus was about three hours away from home; this campus was far enough away from home that I would stay through the weekends. Staying through the weekends meant that I would have to see how I would do spiritually on my own. I also wanted to know if I would stand for Christ alone on this secular campus. Standing in my dorm parking lot, watching my parents drive back toward our farm in Montgomery County, I made a personal decision that I would love God on this secular campus. I did not know what was going to happen, but I resolved to be more than a talker of faith but a doer of God's law.

Every night I would read my Bible even when my roommate would make fun of me. Once and awhile he had his girlfriend stay the night in our room, you can imagine the confusion in my mind as I listened to them do their thing. I met a group of believers on campus who seemed to have a love for Christ and preached his message. My Dad's brother pastored a church about 15 minutes away. His Bible church was different then our church at home. He did not preach with the same loud conviction that my pastor preached at home so culturally I didn't make a good connection with my Dad's brother and his Bible church.

My resolve to be a distinct christian man lasted for about a semester, in my second semester I had conflict with the leadership of our campus ministry. The leader was a very aggressive preacher of Christ on campus and he believed in the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit. This teaching scared me to a point where I pulled away from fellowship with this group. I remember one night they came into my dorm room to pray for me; they told me I had a "mind binding" spirit, I searched the Bible I could not find any reference to a "mind binding" spirit in the whole Bible.

I was now in another bad place. By not making a good connection with my uncle Dave's church nearby, and now learning that I had a "mind binding" spirit, I drifted away from God and His people. Once again I was lost, I had nowhere to turn to find spiritual support. With our campus ministry becoming too spiritual for me to handle, I slide into the way of sin and complacency without the strength to turn and go the right way.

During this time of separation from positive spiritual life, my roommate enticed me to be a part of his "hard" guys group. They acted like the campus thugs. At this point my body was finally growing and getting stronger. I was now about 160 lbs and 5'-7" tall. To be initiated in this "hard" guy club I had to beat up a kid that annoyed them. I never beat anybody up in my life, so I just embarrassed him with my wrestling skills. After successfully earning a spot in this thuggish "hard" guy group, the way of pride and



arrogance were my constant companions on campus for the 2<sup>nd</sup> semester of my freshman year. Part of being a “hard” guy was partying hard on the weekends, I had a car on campus and was designated to go and get the beer in Hagerstown, MD. The drinking age there was 18. I still had a crazy driver deeply embedded in me, so once again I was back drinking and driving. The roads that surrounded this mountainous area were very curvy and up and down, there were many tense moments when I would have to avoid cars and trees. For some crazy reason, I challenged the Lord to kill me or save me.

I bless my God for preserving me through this time. I know He kept me safe because my mom and dad were praying constantly for me. I remember a night when I called my dad in the wee hours of the morning to tell him that I should be excommunicated from the church because of my sins.

I was miserable and could not wait to go home for the summer; it was during the summer that God got a hold of me and began to point me toward His way. A clear turning point occurred one day while I was acting like an a-hole to my mom, as I was yelling at her and disrespecting her, she stopped and with the sternest of faces stared right at me and said, *“Son, what happened to you? you better get your act together or you will be lost!”* In my heart I knew she was right. I wanted to be close to God, I wanted to be a man of God, I wanted to walk with God, but I just did not have the power to do so.

I had not witnessed true faith in the churches that I attended in my early childhood. In between my freshmen and sophomore year of college, I met and fell head over heels for the girl my best friend dated in high school. I had no clue that she had any interest in me while she was dating my friend. One day while being invited to play golf at the local country club where I met my best friend’s girlfriend (nice song), she was working there for the summer as a lifeguard, I stumbled into her at the pool and then later on that night I mustered up the nerve to call her for a date. I fell head over heels in love with her. I was very new to dating; I thought about marriage right away, but she was just looking for a summer fling.

God used this relationship to wake me up. I realized I had been goofing off for several years with my schooling. I had given up on being anything else but a dairy farmer. I felt like I had no other choice but to go to college and come back and work on my dad’s farm. This summer fling had just awakened the reality of life and a real future, I had quit on myself and my future. At this point, to win a good woman I had to come up with a plan. For most of my teenage years I had this hyper-Calvinist attitude that if God wanted to save me, He could at any time zap me with His lightning and stop me in my tracks and turn me into the man of God He wanted me to be.

During this time I had many christian brothers who decided to go to Bible College, but deep down inside of me I did not sense that I was supposed to go to a religious institution to learn how to preach the Gospel. My friends wanted to work in the church system as missionaries and pastors, I knew if I was going to be a preacher I would not do it as a job but as a free flowing radical thing I saw in scripture. Deep inside of me I believed that they were not true preachers, great guys, but not called to preach in unique power, something told me that this was my calling, but I knew I was not ready.

One afternoon, while standing in my driveway meditating on my future, I imagined myself married to this young lady I had just met. I thought about my ability to provide for her and guide her in the truth, I realized that I was not only unprepared to teach her about God’s love, I was not ready to make a home for her. The next day I resolved to start reading my Bible every day whether I felt like it or not!

As for my ability to provide for a woman, I had no sense of direction, no skills! My study habits were non-existent! I did not know what to do with my life. I decided to work harder on the farm than ever. I went off to Penn State with my heart still engulfed in a new romantic flame. So after about 4 weeks into my sophomore year at Penn State I came home for good to help my dad on our dairy farm. I was still in love with Cindy, but she was not really interested in me. The idea of farming was my only option, I thought to myself, "if I was going to be a dairy farmer after I graduated then I needed to know if this lifestyle was for me." Meanwhile Cindy found another love once she went back to Lehigh University. In the final analysis God had used my affection for her to get me to focus on the realities of being a man.

My parents could not pay me enough to allow me to have a car and do things. A man came one day to our farm who was working for a company called, "Happy Viking", a Scandinavian furniture company. This man, Jim, offered me a job as a warehouse and inventory worker on the 2nd shift. It was at this company that I learned that farm kids really have an advantage over kids who grow up in the suburbs. I worked like I drove my car, a maniac. I started to make money; I was promoted every couple of months. I received regular raises, and I drove my coworker's nuts with my enthusiasm for work. I wanted to prove to myself that I was not a failure and that I could be a success in this world.

Still growing at 19 going on 20 got to 5'-10" and a very solid 190 lbs. With my new very strong body I had to find an athletic outlet needed so I took up the game of golf and gave myself over to becoming the best golfer I could become in the fastest period of time. I was ignorant to the fact that to play golf at a high level there is a great advantage to start as a child over someone like me who started playing at age 19. That reality didn't slow me down because I was so desperate to make something of my life, I had wasted so much time feeling sorry for myself in my teenage years. I made tremendous progress at golf but not near enough to be a college golfer. I got to play in some tournaments but again my inexperience got the best of me, I was not battle tested for the competition. By learning the game of golf quickly I started to gain real confidence in my ability to be good at stuff.

God used golf to show me that He had really gifted me with athletic skills I didn't know were inside of me. When I earned the position as a cabinetmaker for "Happy Viking", I realized God had also given me mechanical ability. When I was promoted to the field as their service repair person, I realized God had gifted me as a problem solver and a people person. As an inventory manager, I realized that I had the ability to organize. I summarize these days as the days of "self discovery" I had no idea what I was good at or who I could become. God had allowed me to have this major setback in high school that limited my ability to be a success in school, but after I graduated and grew physically and emotionally I realized how much better I would have been if I had grown 3 or 4 years earlier. These thoughts are still a little upsetting for me. I remember playing sandlot football on Sundays with the kids who played in high school and being able to run all over the field and knock people around that were much bigger than I was.

I continued to read my Bible and go to our local church I had attended before I went off to PSU. I started to wonder about the Holy Spirit. I needed more power in my life so I decided to check out a local Bible Study that was held at a house about 5 minutes from our farm.. The family who hosted this study would show videos from Calvary Chapel's library of teaching. A new brand of worship came into my life! People raising holy hands to God and speaking openly to Him in adoration. I loved this!

Being raised in a very conservative church, we had not opened ourselves to this new brand of worship music. My mom and I loved to listen to Keith Green, Amy Grant, and Michael W Smith, but we just listened to these artists and went to their concerts but we would not know how to incorporate this free style of

worship into our local church. I was seeing first hand what it meant to move in the Spirit. I felt the tangible presence of God when we gathered together to praise His Name. One of my favorite songs at this time was a Keith Green song called, "O Lord, Your Beautiful".

In these studies we were taught about the power of the Holy Spirit. God was starting to move powerfully through the Mennonite churches of our area. These Bible studies were very well attended, I remember that their house was full of young people on Monday nights, about 60 – 70 young people, mostly from the surrounding areas and different churches.

At this Monday night Bible Study I met a young lady who made me forget all about Cindy Cressman. I fell in love with one of the daughters of the family hosting the Bible Study. Tammy and I dated seriously for about six months, I thought she was the one I was to marry, but we were not on the same page spiritually. I was still clinging to the reformed and Calvinistic teaching of my youth. I attribute my attachment to the constant indoctrination of my dad and his brother-in-law, Albert N Martin. My father loved his preaching and so did I, my uncle Al was everybody's hero; he was a great athlete, great preacher, and a great man! I remember as a little kid watching him at our Thanksgiving gatherings in Lancaster, PA kick a football about 60 yards, that was amazing to me, I was in awe of his persona.

I took Tammy to visit my uncle's church in NJ a couple of times. She was not as excited about his very intense and loud style of preaching, she sensed that he was preaching and emphasizing a different aspect of our life in Christ. As we continued to discuss my calling and hers, she gradually started to distance herself from me. At the time I was devastated by this separation but later on I came to see how God used this relationship to expose me to something I needed later on in my life. At this time I was not ready to move into the deeper things of the Spirit. In our local Bible study I noticed people who said that he experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit were still living in sin. I knew in my heart that sin and the "Holy" Spirit were not compatible. My uncle was known as a holy man. I wanted to be holy more than I wanted to be filled with stuff that was way over my head.

Tammy would tell me that she needed to discern God's Voice, when she said this to me about our personal issues I got scared and wondered to myself, "what if God tells her to do something that I don't agree on after we are married", will we just walk away from each other? After some questions about "hearing God" and learning how to determine His will for our lives, eventually I realized that our differences on this issue were deep and we were not operating on the same page of God's plan for our lives. At this same time "Happy Viking" was sending me to New Jersey to help with their Fairfield, NJ store. During my time in New Jersey I would stay at my uncle Al's home. My times with him and his family were great. He was my idol and I hoped to spend a lot of time with him to learn at his feet the way of being a dynamic preacher. Basically I wanted to see if we could change the world together!

My uncle Al invited me to live with him for a season. This invitation to live with my childhood hero was like winning the lottery. I was struggling with my call to ministry; my uncle was the kind of man that I wanted to emulate if I was going to be a preacher. To sit at his feet meant that I would learn firsthand how to be a man of God. This God-ordained opportunity was a tremendous privilege for me and I knew God had arranged it for me.

So at the age of 21, right after I had a period of time exposed to the charismatic movement, I ran away from this possible marriage with Tammy and the associated charismatic movement, to sit under the

foremost leader in the modern day Reformed Baptist movement. At the same time I reacted to my fears of charismatics by becoming an aggressive opponent of what we called, "charismania".

We would say that the "Jesus" movement of the 1970's was full of raw emotion but lacked real biblical substance. I also made great friends here who were just as hungry as I was to be a man of God and at the same time avoid charismania. My uncle was the guru of the reformed faith and he was my mom's brother. My uncle Al became in every way my mentor and spiritual father.

So in the month of April in 1985, I began my tenor as a "serious" reformed Baptist. During this period of my development as a man of God, my uncle Al helped see some of my crudeness and lack of tact in my manner of life. An example would be my manners at the dinner table. I ate like I was starved with my face down on the plate and my elbows pointing out to the side. I suggested that a godly woman from a distinguished background would look at my eating habits and think less of me than necessary

My uncle gave me good direction in what to read and study. My personal devotions became more real to me. He helped me work through my problems with my dad and mom. He helped stop pouting when I had a bad day. I gained much knowledge of how to speak with proper decorum. When he preached he used a broad vocabulary, if I didn't know the meaning of one of his \$20 words I would write them down on a separate piece of paper and study their meaning on my own so when he used the word again I would not be lost. I also gained an understanding of biblical preaching and holiness of life

This method of on-the-job training in the ways of the ministry was going to stick with me for a long time. My uncle felt that the best way to train a man for ministry is to have them learn the Bible and learn preaching by being deeply involved in the church. He believed that the church should not train an independent seminary. I wanted this kind of "on-the-job" training for ministry and my uncle's church had a ministerial academy that I wanted to attend some day. In my home church, I had to listen to so many seminary students present weak messages, here in my uncle's church I sensed the power and presence of the Holy Spirit

I had been around so many seminar students who argued over so much stuff that seemed inconsequential to me and they couldn't preach! My uncle was the prince of preachers! Many viewed him as one of the best preachers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I believed that sitting under my uncle's very powerful preaching ministry that I would be challenged to grow faster than if I were to go to a Bible College and get lost in the crowd of men trying to figure out what God was doing in their lives

After living about two years in NJ, my uncle discouraged me from pursuing seminary and ministry; he rather encouraged me to learn a trade, win a godly woman, and perform the duties of a husband and faithful churchman and seek to earn the role of elder or bishop in the church. I took his counsel very seriously even though inside I was hurt that he felt that I was a long way off from a preaching ministry. His decision had one major impact; it drove me to focus exclusively on business and a career in a corporate setting. I was not double minded when it came to work or at being successful at work. But I looked at all my jobs and promotions as a means of grace to become a better man of God one day

Being a very competitive person, I wanted to be sure that God was aiming me to focus exclusively on business at this time versus a full time preaching ministry. I didn't really want to be the kind of preacher who struggles constantly to make ends meet. This experience I was all too familiar with those I had studied in my family throughout my childhood days

## Sharon is the “One”

From the age of 21 to 26 I was discouraged from pursuing a serious dating relationship. I spent a lot of time alone with God. At the age of 23, I moved from a friend’s bachelor parlor to live with a wonderful family with four kids. Their youngest child, David, was afflicted with cerebral palsy. David was the sweetest kid I had ever met. They allowed me to live in their remodeled garage behind their home in Clifton, NJ. At this time I developed knowledge and skill in the sheet metal trade. One of the deacons in the church hired me right after I moved to NJ. The sheet metal trade was still going very strong in the New York Metro area. I knew that if I learned this trade that maybe someday I would have my own contracting company.

For the most part I was very diligent in work and in studying God’s word. Even though I was discouraged from dating by my uncle I always had a girl that I was thinking about dating. When I turned 25 years old I was starting to think I would never find a woman who met my uncle’s requirements and one that I liked. My uncle was very much involved with guiding young singles and others in their choice of a mate.

It seemed that the ones that I thought were great, he, or those around me in the church didn’t think we were a good match. I wanted to honor my elders so I kept listening to their counsel and waiting on God for a woman that He would send my way. One of my favorite verses to quote during this time was the Proverb that says, “a prudent wife is from the Lord” and “he obtains favor from the Lord.”

I wanted God’s choice for a wife, but I was lonely and frustrated. My mom and dad invited me to come home for my 25<sup>th</sup> birthday, at that time I remember telling my family that I was so depressed waiting for a wife. I thought I would never get married. Fortunately for me, toward the end of 1989, God had mercy on my sad heart and brought to me a beautiful young woman by the name of Sharon Driesse.

Sharon’s dad and my uncle are good friends even to this day. Sharon was the oldest of four children. Her father had a reputation as a tough guy to win over, but I didn’t care, I had my eye on Sharon ever since she was a teenager. She was a little wild as a teenage girl so she was off limits for a guy who was trying to please the leadership of the church. Sharon had a very serious but secretive relationship with a Catholic boy in her neighborhood. He wanted to marry Sharon but Sharon’s dad would not even speak to him because he was Catholic. The resistance of Sharon’s father drove the relationship into secrecy.

Again fortunately for me, her father’s toughness on this poor catholic young man worked out for me and her. After she went back to her dad and gave herself to serving the Lord in the church,. Sharon came to see that she was a sinner and gave her heart to the Lord at the age of 20. I couldn’t wait for her to be baptized, I was told not to date her until she was a member of the church and baptism was a prerequisite. As she was still coming up out of the waters of baptism I was planning on dating and marrying her. Her hair was still wet from the water in the baptismal pool when I asked her out on our first official date!

Sharon and I got serious about each other right away and within a year we were married! On October 20<sup>th</sup> 1990 Sharon and I were married at our church and we were very much excited and happy! We had secured an apartment within 5 minutes of her parents home in Pompton Plains, NJ. This was one of the nicest communities I had lived in while I lived in NJ. I wanted to eventually move back to PA, so waited for a few months before looking for a job in my home state. The cost of living in NJ was so high, I knew if I was going to provide a nice home for my new bride I would need to find more affordable housing then the

typical \$250,000 ranch in our town. I also felt an urge in my heart to move near my grandfather in Lancaster, PA.

The Lord led us, in the spring of 1991, to move to Lancaster, PA. I hoped to settle back into a slower pace of life than I was experiencing in NJ. We decided to live in a duplex with an Amish family; we lived on the powered side of their large farm house. We enjoyed getting to know this family and their way of life. We lived only 10 minutes away from my grandfather who was another one of my childhood heroes. My grandfather, George Martin, was nearing the time of his departure from this life, even to this day I still believe he was one of the greatest men I ever met or have ever known. His example of godliness and faithful consistency will always be part of my life. His example of love for lost sinners also made a tremendous impact on my life.

At age 86, the Lord took our grandfather to his heavenly home in 1993, before his death he had written out his funeral service. He chose me to speak on behalf of his 45 grandchildren. This was probably the most humbling experience of my life. I was so taken back by his request for me to speak; we had other more established young men in our family who were much more capable of speaking instead of me, but the Lord led him to ask me as the 9<sup>th</sup> oldest grandchild. To this day I still don't know why he picked me to speak, but those who were there sensed the Lord's help as I shared my heart for him and said that I did a good job representing their hearts as well!

In order to move to PA I needed a job, out of the 20 or so sheet metal companies that I asked for a job only one gave me an opportunity to prove my skills as a sheet metal technician. This company, Dentech, hired me to be a salesman. They also had an engineering division that I had the privilege of working with during my time with them. This was the first sales job I ever had; and I had no idea what I was doing in this role but being enthusiastic about learning new things in the sheet metal and HVAC industry, I poured my heart into being the best salesman I could be. They offered more services than any other company I had ever worked for in the HVAC industry. In order to find my way with this new company I found an industry that they had no experience in and started selling a new product that I hoped would make them and me lots of money!

During my time with this company, Sharon conceived our first child, Jenna Corrine Keener, at the beginning of 1992. Things were going really well with my job until halfway through Sharon's pregnancy. When Sharon was about 6 months pregnant I lost my job due to the most horrible of circumstances. In my position as a salesman and selling a brand new product, I got the idea from an older businessman that I should only do this work if I were to get sales commissions. They were paying me a salary and I was about to open a door for them that could have made them millions of dollars. I was selling a product that was manufactured in Sweden. Their corporate offices were in Edison, NJ. Their product was the only product we found that could solve the diesel exhaust contamination problem with one of our local fire departments that we could not solve.

As I studied the operation of the Swedish product by a firsthand encounter at an installation in the state of NY, I immediately got excited about selling this product all over PA. There were about 3500 fire departments in the state of PA, the average sale to each of these departments was estimated at around \$28,000 and I said to myself, *"I could become a millionaire before I reach 30 years old!"*

The owners of the company didn't think I would be able to sell one fire department as quickly as I did. Being unsuccessful I would be terminated, but after 4 months I sold two fire station projects and

completed the entire sale and project by myself. This technical product just seemed to make sense to me; God had given me an understanding of the inner workings of this unique product. In every way the skills that God gave me to understand this product were supernatural.

Before I sold my first project, I asked the owners of the company if I could start receiving commissions on my sales since this was a “new” division and product line and the earning potential would be great for them and me. They said that after I sold the first two departments and trained them on how to install the product, I would start receiving commissions. Right after I sold, trained, and installed the first two projects, they fired me! My wife and I were stunned; this was my first hard lesson in the business world.

I sat at the kitchen table of our newly purchased home totally confused by what had happened to me. I started praying hard and reading the Bible, begging the Lord to show me what to do! Because I was good at selling this product and installing it, the people in NJ who sold our company this Swedish product kept in contact with me to see if I wanted a job at their Edison, NJ office. I tried to get a local person to work with me in PA to sell to the fire service but they were not interested! After about 2 months of trying everything to stay in PA, Sharon and I moved back to NJ so I could take this job in Edison. I went back into the hardest place for me to buy a house for a growing family. I had told my wife we would never move back to NJ; well now I was going to eat those words.

Our first child was born on October 4<sup>th</sup> 1992. Little baby Jenna came out with bunches and bunches of hair and the cutest little face. She was so beautiful and Sharon was so happy to have a little girl. Sharon’s family was so excited about Jenna, they doted on her constantly.

## **My First Step into Corporate Life!**

The company that just hired me paid me less than I was making in New Jersey when I left for the less stressful life of PA. I was making less money but I had more responsibility and a married man and a new baby. The company offered me \$24,000 a year with a .05% override on all the sales in the fire product division. I had justified my decision to move back to NJ and take this job with lower pay by telling myself that I was going to get my business experience with this new company and that down the road, my experience and contacts would eventually translate to more earning potential in the future.

I thought I was going to do inside sales and sell all their products over the phone to end users or their national distribution network. Once I moved back to NJ and started working at their Edison office, I realized they had something else in store for me. They told me I was going to teach people all over the country how to install this fire station product I had just installed in two stations in PA!

I was very excited about the prospect of being involved with the fire station exhaust removal product. I became their engineer and product manager for a system I had just installed two times. As a product manager I learned more about doing CAD drawings and writing manuals for our distribution. Also if systems were not working I would try to guide installers on how to fix them over the phone. I started to gain confidence as a technical teacher and engineer. Eventually this job would literally take me all over the USA.

After about two months of helping installers over the phone, we had a system in East Hartford, CT that was not working and the company’s reputation was being tortured. The fire chief of the department thought

that he had made a mistake purchasing our system over the competitors and was bad mouthing our company and making my boss's life miserable.

One day after listening to him complain to me about this problem I told him that I could fix the system if he would just let me go to the station and see the problem first hand. So off I went to East Hartford, CT. I could not believe that they let a guy who had only installed two systems in his whole life represent their global company. But nobody else had the confidence or the desire to go and face the problem head-on but me.

At this point I felt tangibly the Hand of the Lord with me in my work. I knew I was under his blessing during these days, I didn't make a lot of money for myself, but I earned much respect from my peers and my bosses, soon more money would eventually come my way. I had such a confidence in doing this business that I felt there wasn't a challenge I could not overcome with His help. I also was somewhat over confident to many folks, but the Lord's hand guided me in the ways of business and corporate life.

It was good to be wrapped up in the affairs of the modern business world. I saw this world from many different vantage points, our company was based in Sweden, and our distribution was all over the world. When we had our international conferences, I met people from all over the world; at these meetings, God gave me perspective on what was going on in the world. I would never have known had it not been for my employment in this company.

I learned so many lessons about business and people that I would not trade with any school experience. Just learning how to get on and off an airplane was a great experience. I went to several military bases in some of the most beautiful places on planet earth. The Lord really opened me up to different kinds of people and culture in our country! I praise God for guiding me in my career as a salesman and project manager. But new things were still going to come my way.

## **My Pursuit of Business and Financial Stability**

So from 1985 to 1996 I was deeply entrenched in the circle of the reformed Baptist community, trying my absolute best to climb as high as possible the business success ladder and at the same time win at life's materialistic lottery. And at the same time I sought to be a good churchman. But I sensed that I was drifting from where I was in the days leading up to finally finding the wife God had wanted for me. Sharon and I were stressed out trying to keep our life balanced between family and work. She was so close to her family while I was running around trying to pay the bills.

In the early part of 1994, Sharon got pregnant again, this time we were living in her uncle Henry's apartment. With our money situation tightening, Sharon felt totally unprepared for another baby. I remember her crying during this pregnancy. My mother told her that babies that are born during times of great stress are very special. On December 30<sup>th</sup> 1994, baby Rebecca Noelle was born with no hair and weighing in at a hefty 8lbs. 8oz. She was a wonderful addition to our family and to this day she remains very close to her Mommy's heart!

After I entered the business world with this new company, I met a man who I believed would train me to be a great salesman and corporate leader. His name was Wayne Lutz. He was very successful in the clean air industry as an entrepreneur and salesman. I became his right hand man as we built our fire station



division into the strongest part of our company. I learned at his feet about business life, just as I had at the feet of my uncle in the spirit realm, how to improve my skill in things related to building a company.

By late 1996, I had a good handle on what I liked and didn't like in our church, and now, I had a decent understanding of what made for a quality business plan. Wayne taught me the basic principle of *"management by objective"* versus *"management by the emotion of the company!"*. Due to Wayne's strong influence on my life and thinking, I was ready to take on new challenges and I was ready to work like crazy to fulfill that plan. Through taking large risks and teaching many people how to be successful I had actually worked my way up to the position of National Sales Manager. I am constantly amazed by this path, seeing that I was nothing more than a naive farm kid from the hills of northeastern PA.

Much of the credit of my success as a businessman is rightly placed at the feet of my uncle Al and his very strong influence on developing my character as man. By his godly example he taught me how to handle myself in front of people and how to manage my time. Even though I will never be as organized as he was as a pastor of his church and leader of a worldwide association of pastors, I still gained much confidence by watching his method of handling people and problems.

It makes me chuckle to realize today that even though I was so influenced by my uncle to be very structured in my manner of life, I still walk in the ways of an ADD personality, I'm sure to his chagrin, it didn't matter how much of his manner of life I absorbed, I never fit totally into his kind of rigidity. As a thinker and as a preacher I rather prefer the ADD way of life. Today it doesn't bother me when a Bible study or time of prayer gets off track. I just have learned to flow with the twists and turns of our crazy high-speed life. I feel that all of us who now consider ourselves older men need to be very patient with the young men raised in our fast paced and fatherless society. Their world is much different then ours, so we must have sensitivity to their way of managing their lives.

## **Texas Here We Come!**

By the end of 1995 I was getting tired of chasing the carrot that was being moved further and further out in front of me. Some of my clients told me that if I really wanted to make money in the "clean air" business I would need to start my own distributorship. After thinking and praying about this idea, I asked the Lord if this was His will then "where" should I go and build a fire station ventilation distributorship.

All signs were leading me to the state of Texas. There was something about this state that intrigued me. Maybe it was their pride in their state and in their way of life and their independent spirit. I had just helped a Christian man start building a distributorship in the state who had no background in HVAC. So I planned a move for our family, now with two beautiful little girls, Jenna, who was 3, and Rebecca who had just turned 1. Early in 1996, I visited a town called Wylie, TX where I had connected up with some old contacts from the church I attended in Allentown, PA. The town of Wylie, just north of Dallas, was not too big that we would get lost in the town and it wasn't so small that nothing was going on.

The family that I reconnected with strongly encouraged us to move away from NJ and our rigid church life. They even said that if my business venture with the man who had started the business in TX for me fell through, they would partner with me. In March of 1996 we moved to Wylie, TX right after a 30 inch snow storm. I had no solid partnership contract in place. Basically I took the wildest risk of my life. This was not real smart, but I believed that God was in it!

We left NJ just in time to avoid the biggest division my uncle ever had in his church. Several of our personal friends were involved. We missed out on all the slander and backbiting in this messy church split, what a blessing to miss out on all this conflict.

We wanted to be part of a smaller church in Wylie, hoping that we could be more involved; I had a quiet sense that this move into a smaller church would reactivate the call of God in my life. The move to TX proved to be the turning point in my call to preach the gospel. I was asked to teach Adult Sunday School at the very new church plant several times and each time I taught the Word, I was told that the Spirit attended my teaching. I thought I knew much more than I really did, it was in TX that I realized I needed more time in the Word.

After just a few weeks in Wylie, the man who said he would partner with me, backed out of this partnership and then asked me to buy his inventory. I did not have the money to buy his inventory so once again I was stuck. I was lost in a state of bewilderment wandering once again due to how I had let myself trust people so much.

After about 2 months I made a business arrangement with a man I had helped to build a fire station ventilation business in the state of Kansas and Missouri. He believed in my ability to build the business in TX so he gave me money to buy the inventory of the fella who backed out of the partnership and he paid my salary for 3 months. His total investment amounted to about \$25,000.

After about 3 months my old boss, Wayne Lutz, contacted me to see if I would move back to NJ and help him manage the fire station business in a fuller capacity. He had just been promoted to President of the company and wanted to have me take his position in the company. It would have meant a lot more money than I had made before, BUT I told the Lord I did not want to go back to NJ again. So I worked out a deal with him to be the Western Regional Manager of the USA market. He paid me a nice salary and a decent commission to do this for him, but I wanted to know one thing, "would he pay back the guy who had loaned me \$25,000!"

They flew me to NJ to discuss this financial payback arrangement with his boss who came in special from Sweden and five other department heads. They all agreed to pay back my old partner a percentage of each sale made from the TX market and other sales that I personally generated in the Western USA territory. I was happy they agreed to this arrangement and went about my business and started selling like crazy, to the tune of \$700,000 in sales over the next eighteen months. My sales were higher than I had projected, yet the company did not pay my old partner one dime.

For six months I called and called my old boss to get his word that he would pay back my silent partner which now totaled \$30,000 with the interest that had accrued due to all the delays. I even had my old boss; Wayne and the partner, meet me at my house to discuss the matter. My boss told my old partner that he would pay him what was owed --- \$30,000.

The payback never happened. I sought a lawyer to help us figure out our options, meanwhile our time in Wylie was coming to an end, we felt like being close to the city of Dallas was no longer necessary because my boss and his company were not doing their part to keep my biggest potential customer, Dallas Fire Department, happy with constant service. They were ignoring my work and my goodwill as a key to winning this very hopeful and profitable business.

I had given myself to keep the Dallas FD system operational for almost three years, yet, they did not acknowledge this effort and did not pay for the equipment I had installed as a trial system so we could win the bid of the entire fire department which included about 66 fire stations. The amount of business this would eventually generate was almost 2 million in the initial contract to install the systems and another 3 million in service contracts once the systems were installed. These service contracts continue to the current day so every time they renew a contract we would be blessed with income, but due to the work of the enemy I not only made no money I eventually was sued by my old partner for the \$30,000 that was supposed to be paid by the company I worked for after they received the money from the sales I generated, which was \$700,000, and the profit on these sales was close to \$400,000.

In 1998 all this trauma came to a head, I realized that I should have never partnered with an unbeliever. The dissolution of my relationship with my old boss caused me and my family tremendous financial hardship. There was no reason why the business plan I created and built in TX should have failed! But the lack of integrity and deception of those I worked for and a bad choice in partners ruined me.

In order to survive I went to work for our competitor, once I did this I was sued for breaking my non-compete clause in my employment contract. They refused to keep their word with me and pay my business debt yet I could not leave and take care of my family and gain employment with another company? I had spent almost five years working my tail off making money for my bosses and others, yet I was totally broke and liable for tens of thousands of dollars because of lies and deception.

On top of this the relationships I had built in this industry were sullied by lies and slander which I could have sued my old company for, but I didn't. My old boss, Wayne, told my friends that I had embezzled \$300,000 dollars from his company. He did this to keep me from taking his customer base away from his company to the competitor's company. They say that business is just business, it's not personal, but this horrible pack of lies that ruined my reputation was very personal to me. I shared Christ with most of my customers and business contacts, to turn me into a thief was hard to take, in fact, it broke my heart!

This experience served as a great wakeup call with me and my obedience to His call on my life. The difficult partnership I had entered into and my naïveté about the company I had faithfully served for five years got my attention. In the summer of 1998, I renewed my vow to serve the Lord with every part of my humanity, just like I had been doing to get ahead in my business life.

We had moved from Wylie, TX to Magnolia, TX in the spring of 1998 so we could enter into the life of a more established Reformed Baptist church. My pastor, Dale Burris, was like my uncle in that he was a man's man. He loved the outdoors and he loved people. He showed me things as a pastor that I hadn't seen in my uncle's ministry. The main thing I learned from Dale was how he moved in the community where he labored as a pastor. He was very visible in the small community of Magnolia, TX, he was a known person by those who did not go to his church, I thought this is what a man of God should be doing in order to make an impact on his local community. Dale accomplished his connection with the community of Magnolia through his horses. Dale raised championship Palomino horses; every time there was a show in town or in the region, Dale was there involved as a regular person who loves horses.

My time with Dale would be too short. After my wife and I went back to the funeral of her grandmother in the spring of 1999, I felt a strong sense that God was leading me back to NJ... AGAIN! This was not my plan because my wife and I were really enjoying the small community life of Magnolia, TX, we were starting to make really good friends in Magnolia and in the church. But we felt at the same time that God was

leading us to go back to NJ. This time I felt more confident than Sharon did, when we moved back in 1992 she was so excited, this time, she felt sad because she would miss her friends. So would I miss TX.

During our time in Magnolia, TX we had another beautiful baby girl. Makayla Marie Keener was born on May 27<sup>th</sup> 1998. During Sharon's pregnancy our church would pray every Wednesday night for the two ladies in the church who were pregnant. The men poured their heart out for Sharon and this other young lady. They cried out for the well being and destiny of these babies and the faith they proclaimed over these young babies was so amazing to me. Makayla still bears these prayers in her life today. I just baptized her this year in Tom's creek which runs by our property. She just has a certain way about her and a real destiny in God!

This move back to NJ was different than the last one from PA. My uncle Al was hurting after the church was severely fractured by an exodus of about 100 people. We sensed we were supposed to bring some healing back to the church. "The mutiny" had caused much pain to all involved and healing was absolutely necessary for the church to move forward the way God wanted them too.

Due to my deep loyalty to my uncle's personal ministry in my earlier years I felt somewhat beholden to do my part to help my spiritual father and spiritual guide. He told me he wanted to take the church in a new direction. I wanted to help him; this was what I had dreamed about doing when I was younger, so I thought that my time had come to do what God had called me to do what I thought I was supposed to do when I first moved to NJ as a young wide-eyed single man ready to conquer the world.

## **I'm a Man Now**

After our move back to NJ, and we started to settle back into the life of the church we became men and women of God, I started to share with my uncle what I had experienced in TX and in my business life. I told him that I had promised God that the rest of my life I would serve God with everything that I had!

As is typical of my uncle, he made the obstacle of becoming a leader in the church very high. He continued just as in times past to challenge me to go on with business and that leadership in the church was not for now. After I laid my heart bare to him about all the stuff I was dealing with personally and my belief that God had allowed me to go through all these setbacks just to get my attention, I really thought that he would understand, for the first time in my life I started to question his sensitivity to what the Spirit of God was doing in my life. I started to doubt just a little whether he could really help me find my way in God.

If I was going to attend his church I knew though that he was the one I had to please, but something was starting to change in our relationship, this time I was much more open with him, I was not so intimidated by his presence and his persona. I was open with him about my feelings like never before, I shared my observations on what was really going on in the church.

So after about two years of seeking to do whatever my wife and I could do to help the church heal, I started to think that maybe our church and other reformed Baptist churches were missing something in our responsibility to obey the Spirit of God.

Our church was located in a fairly affluent area of North Jersey, but we were not getting the locals to come and visit the church and if they did come they didn't stay. I would ask people who walked out of the church what it was that they didn't like about the church. What I heard I didn't want to believe. We tried to talk

to people as people and not as potential attendees, in other words, we tried to be real with people. I believe to this day that our biggest problem was that we were incapable of entering into the struggle to present Jesus to people who were lost and broken.

Looking back on my own life I could see clearly that I had become a doctrinal knucklehead, I had lost the simple Jesus way of connecting to common sinners! We spent too much time honing our confession to the point where it became an idol. I believed that we were too wrapped in fighting the straw men in Christendom then we were in dealing with the real people in our neighborhood and families. We had unknowingly developed a defensive approach to young men who wanted to serve the Lord in ministry. Many would get discouraged by his method of reproving and training them as they developed their gifts. It was like you were either a qualified elder or you were a deacon, other than these two hard to win offices, there was nothing a man could do to feel like they were just as important to the church as any elder or deacon.

To illustrate, Trinity Baptist church is located within eyesight of a large public high school. In our thirty plus years of being located right next to the high school we were unable to ever start a true campus ministry. It was like the thought never really crossed our mind. Instead our churches put most of its money and focus on developing our classical K-12 Christian School. During this time I started to wonder about how prepared our classically educated kids were to reach a lost and dying generation of postmodern youth.

### **Earning Respect as a Man of God in My Home!**

I changed my way of exercising spiritual oversight of my home after we moved to TX. Instead of being absorbed in my work I decided to take charge of the spiritual life of our family. This decision paid off when we went back to NJ in 1999. Our family of three children was very close and I felt very connected to the hearts of my 3 beautiful girls. Earlier in our marriage I was so busy traveling and trying to make it in the business that I lost my way as a father and husband.

As a single man I spent lots of time in the Word of God preparing myself for full time ministry, I hoped if I were to have a wife that I would be able to spiritually guide my wife and children in God's way. If I didn't win a bride I believed that I was disqualified from having any leadership position in the church. This understanding had been drilled into me by the teaching of our home church from I Tim. 3:1-8. In our first five years of marriage, I was so busy trying to make ends meet, I had lost my way spiritually, I lost my place as head of our home.

When I reflected back on my youth I remembered the big decision that my father made when he launched out to own his own dairy business. He too got caught in the trap of the busyness of chasing the dreams of our human heart; he was so busy trying to keep the family farm going that he struggled to maintain the balance of work and domestic life and his place in God spiritually.

I watched my father struggle to keep my mom spiritually supported during these years. In the ten years he operated our small dairy farm, he experienced two years of severe drought. During these two seasons of tremendous loss, my father was hit with a strong spirit of depression which overcame him so severely that he would not even speak to us. The worst time I seemed to recollect that he barely spoke to us for a full two years. Reflecting back I have come to see that my dad suffered from depression, a disease which plagued his forefathers.

During these times of struggle with God, I would ask my dad at the dinner table in front of the rest of the family, "When are you going to come and help us?" Looking back now, I realize through my own struggles, that even though the Lord seemed so far away, He was there holding us and carrying us through this very hard time by His amazing grace. Now, at the age of 32, I was starting to fall into the same trap as my father and I was scared.

As Sharon and I entered our 6<sup>th</sup> year of marriage, the Lord started to tug at my heart. He brought me back to the place where I remembered those vows of my earlier teenage years that I made to Him, vows of promise that I would take care of my wife spiritually. By the end of 1995 I was so tired both emotionally and physically so much so that I contracted a case of Mononucleosis. During this 6 month period of sickness, I determined that a physical relocation of me and my family was in order. I needed to get away from my narcissistic boss. My desire to please people and my boss's demanding self-driven personality were a bad combination.

By 1996 I was determined to get back to the place I had in God when I was single. I made a determined effort to be a priest in my home, to take my wife and my kids into the Word, to pray over them. This decision and effort led to a search for a place to take my newly acquired expertise as a diesel exhaust ventilation guru. We found Texas to be the most favorable place to begin again.

In retrospect, I believe our move to Texas will prove to be a major part of getting me ready for the work I would eventually be called to perform for the Father. Had we not made the move to TX in 1996, our family would have not had a hands-on dad and my wife would not have a husband spiritually involved in the affairs of our family.

## **Our First Son!**

Another very significant event occurred in our family before the terrorist attacks of Sept.11<sup>th</sup> 2001. Sharon and I had our third child in TX, sweet little Makayla Keener, she was "Texas" in every way but I was still waiting for that elusive 1<sup>st</sup> son. Being the only son in our family, I wanted my own boy to carry on the Keener name for my father. At this point in our family's history, my mom was still alive and deeply involved in the affairs of our family. I wanted her to experience the joy of holding in her arms a grandson! The Lord was about to grant us our request!

Sharon and I never had trouble getting pregnant until we had Makayla; she had a miscarriage right after the birth of Makayla. After the move back to NJ we tried to have another baby, nine months passed -- no pregnancy. Through this frustrating time of wondering and waiting, I decided to ask Sharon to pray with me for a son. As we held each other we prayed a simple and short prayer. On this December night I simply asked the Lord that if He gave us a son, then we would give him back.

Within a few weeks Sharon was pregnant. No sonogram necessary, I knew it was a boy! After thinking his name should be Samuel (based on Hannah's prayer), we felt that the Lord wanted us to name the baby, Seth. While the twin towers were burning to the ground on 9-11, my wife and I were hoping this tragedy would not cause her to have our "Seth" before his time. Seth was born on the birthday of our oldest daughter Jenna, October 4<sup>th</sup>; he weighed 9 lbs. 11oz... I told the nurses at the time of Seth's delivery the story of our prayer to have a son and that he belonged to God, they were amazed.

## Revive Us, Oh Lord!

At this point in my life the word “revival” was getting more and more central to my thinking. As a boy I was very interested in biographical accounts of men who were involved with great moves of God in America and abroad. The Great American Revivals or Awakenings seemed to have a real connection with my heart.

By the end of 2000 I was tired of not seeing a move of God in our church where people were actually getting saved out of our godless culture. I sensed the Spirit of God’s frustration too with His people. How could anything turn around in America if we weren’t out in the streets sharing Christ with any and everyone who would hear? We had conveniently compartmentalized our faith and submerged it under a cloak of hypocrisy that showed that we had bought into the same lie as the Israelites who worshiped both Yahweh and Baal. We were now being called to recover the ancient landmarks, the way of our faithful forefathers and do as they did to bring our nation under the government of Christ in their hearts.

I started to pour my heart out at the prayer meetings at church, which I knew was touching those who were praying with me. Back when I was single and new to the church, I chose to be very shy at church prayer meetings. Quite frankly, in those early days, I was petrified to pray publicly, but after I had that time with God in TX, I decided to hell with that fear, I resolved to cry out for the lost and whenever and whatever the Lord wanted.

Sometime between the end of the winter of 2001 and the spring of 2002, as my mother was dying of cancer, my heart was so connected to a spiritual awakening in America so much so that I could not make any sense of it, as I prayed for the Lord to comfort my mom on her deathbed, I would cry out for the next generation, believing that He would raise up leaders in the rising generation that would turn America back to God.

Dealing with the tragedy of watching my mom die, I started to sense that my times with God in prayer were taking on a new personality, God started to move me outside of the religious box I had been trained to stay in for so many years. The Lord brought new people into my life either from different parts of Christendom, where there was a more evangelical thrust in ministry, or I was given the opportunity to meet men who were seeing results in their evangelistic efforts in public places.

I met one man who visited our church one time that said something to me that just stuck. This man was involved in working inside the public schools, his ministry, Youth Alive, was seeing results in establishing student-led teacher sponsored ministries in public high schools in NJ. They developed a new approach in reaching kids in the public schools, it was a direct style. They would approach the leadership of the public high schools in NJ and tell them that they wanted to offer onsite campus ministry to assist the school with their troubled youth. I remember asking him directly, ***“Is God moving in your ministry?”*** He looked straight at me and laughed and said, ***“Of course, God is moving!”***

## **My Leader, My Guide!**

The man who was my spiritual father and my pastor and who had such an impact on shaping my perception of God and in who I was as a man. At this point I was starting to get a sense that God was moving on me, I reflected on how he was touched by God at the age of 17, and how that Divine work impacted his life.

My uncle Albert N. Martin, was saved at age 17 in the Salvation Army church; his conversion was so radical that his parents had no doubt the work of grace wrought in his young teenage heart was all of God. Soon after his salvation, young Albert, or “Sonny” as his mom and dad called him, was out on the street preaching.

He was a star football player on a state championship team and that was his identity until the Lord touched him. He along with a few of his high school friends began a grassroots movement to bring revival to their community soon after their conversion in grace. Albert sought out the best possible Bible School to attend to get the training he needed to fulfill his call to preach God’s word!

In my heart I believed that my uncle could have been one of the greatest evangelists of our time. Some church leaders dubbed him, “the greatest preacher of the 20<sup>th</sup> century!” He made the very difficult decision to go right to Bible College at the age of 18, rather than go to college to play football, this decision was a real heartbreak for his father. After a brief time at Bob Jones University, Albert landed at Columbia Bible College and there he finished his training in ministry.

From there he entered into ministry within the Christian Missionary Alliance denomination. As an itinerant minister he developed a reputation as a powerful preacher of holiness and radical born-again living. He continued just a short while in his itinerant preaching capacity until he was called to preach for a CMA church in Essex Fells, NJ. This CMA church called him to labor in full time ministry, where he stayed for his entire ministry life, eventually he moved this same CMA church to join with the emerging Reformed Baptist Association of churches. He will always be recognized as one of the key men that brought Calvinistic teaching back to the church in America.

As an anointed and powerful preacher, he developed a reputation as a man who walked the walk and talked the talk. When he preached I and many others could feel the presence of God in a very powerful way. Sometimes when he preached you could hear sobbing in the pews as men and women would come under conviction of sin.

The late and great theologian, John Murray of Westminster Seminary in Abington, PA, had a very strong influence on his ministry and future direction. John Murray loved my uncle and his preaching. At a conference in England where John Murray would have normally preached to close the night of ministry, he called my uncle at the tender age of 32 to preach in his place. As a young boy I remember my father listening to my uncle preach on reel to reel tapes.

Sometime in the earlier part of his ministry, before his call into the full time pastorate, A.W. Tozar, another great man of God, laid his hands on my uncle and blessed his future ministry. Over the years my uncle would recount the story of the night he sought the baptism of the Holy Spirit, he prayed all night and never was able to receive it. Oh how I wish he could have come into some of the blessings of that kind of supernatural experience. His younger brother, David, would also enter the CMA denomination, but he



would not have the same problem as his older brother with the whole matter of receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Looking back on my life with my uncle I now see this as a sad part of his spiritual life. If he would have embraced the deeper life movement that AW Tozar preached, then I believe it would have added some really helpful keys to assist sinners break strongholds in their lives. He preached many times on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, but mostly his focus was on the area of personal sanctification.

While many in his time focused on a style of preaching to get people to come to the altar and receive salvation, my uncle would encourage them to go to God and seek His Face to get all of Christ into their lives so they could live a holy life. His focus in his pulpit ministry was on the Christian man's daily walk with God. Here he incorporated a heavy dose of the teaching from the Puritans and the old divines who were part of the Anglican Church.

The average observer of my uncle's ministry does not know that my uncle has a tremendous anointing to preach the message of salvation in Christ alone. When he would step away from his notes and preach on the glory of Jesus death and atonement, people would listen as though they were watching the Lord himself preach on His own atonement.

When I first arrived to live in his home, my uncle was preaching through the gospel of Mark verse by verse. It was during this series, which lasted about 5-7 years that I saw the beauty of Jesus like I had never seen it before. I loved to listen to him lift up Jesus as He is wonderfully displayed as the servant of God in the Gospel of Mark.

Later on in his ministry, after a few hard separations with his key leaders, he became defensive and very polemical in his preaching ministry. His effort to gather men to do a work of true unity in Christ and bring in time of real reformation in the church had fallen short. The people were not becoming full of spiritual revival. The truths in the Word that we never really studied were: the supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit with the manifestation of signs and wonders and the premillennial view on end time teaching.

Right before I left the church in 2002, my uncle preached his first series of sermons on end-time events. His main point against the premillennial teaching was that the Bible never uses the word "rapture" to describe the Lord coming to take His Bride up to heaven. As an "amil" proponent, he preached a form of "replacement theology" that I now openly reject. This teaching puts the church in the place of the Jewish nation as the recipient of the outpoured Holy Spirit. No reference to the restoration of the temple or the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Israel.

In my study of the Old Testament, which I now love to study, Israel and the church were interchangeable. No time did I ever remember him preaching verse by verse through an Old Testament book? Not that he needed to, no, it was just a reality of his ministry. He never felt like he was capable of preaching the Old Testament because he was not strong in the Hebrew language. If he ever wanted to know more about the Bible it was that he wished he had learned Hebrew in a much deeper way!

I would summarize His preaching ministry this way: His focus was primarily on the work of the Holy Spirit in the process of sanctification. One of his favorite scripture quotations was "By their fruit you shall know them" and "Be ye Holy as I am Holy" these words were a very dominant theme of his ministry. His feature texts were 2Cor.7:1, Heb 12:14, & I Pet 1:17 which demanded personal holiness or no salvation. His more

biblical view on the eldership of the church and on how to train men for the ministry made his ministry unique and gave him worldwide attention as a pioneer in the raising up of men in the ministry.

I value all the years I spent with my uncle Al in his church. But for years I resented him for holding me back, now I see that he was doing what he felt was best for his church. I simply was being called to do something different and soon I would find out what the world was going to be. I was starting to see that obeying God was more important than worrying about what men can say or do! My uncle Al had a major and important impact on my life. I would tell people who left his church angry at him and his style of ministry these words, *“that no matter what they did from that point on in their Christian life, they would have a piece of him in their work”*, that was the influence he made on our lives and that impact would make many of us more valuable in our calling.

## How Do We Reach Our Neighbors?

As you can see from this account, from the age of 21 – 38 years of age, my uncle was in every way my spiritual father, I considered every action with these words, **“what would my uncle do in this situation.”** The older I got, I sensed that I was being called by the Lord, someday, to carry his vision to the next generation. If that unlikely event were ever to happen, I felt like we should move the church toward a more evangelistic and local community focus. As the 21<sup>st</sup> century approached and eventually the tragedy of 9-11, I personally had to release myself from wanting to receive his blessing as a minister of the Gospel. Not having his hands laid on me to do the work of ministry was a real heartbreak for me and still bothers me to this day.

In 2002, I made a vow to reach my neighbors with a home bible study. After the twin towers collapsed I was more focused than ever on my Pompton Lakes, NJ suburban neighborhood. The way I approached my neighbors was to walk through our wonderful neighbor and pray as I walked our new son, Seth, in a baby stroller.

My simple approach was to begin by waving to my neighbors and start conversations. Our desire to reach our neighbors in Pompton Lakes was extenuated by feeling called to bring healing to this broken hearted community. We purchased the home where a horrible domestic violence crime had been committed months earlier, the husband murdered his wife and eventually killed himself, leaving two young boys. Jealousy seemed to be the cause of the strife in the home that led to this horrible incident.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the 9-11 tragedy, I started a home bible study at our home in Pompton Lakes to reach our neighbors. I did so without the blessing of our church leadership. The day of our first study was so unique, the wind was blowing at gusts up to 60 miles an hour, yet the skies were clear and beautiful. We could hear emergency vehicle sirens blowing the whole time we sat in our living room sharing God’s word with our neighbors. Tree limbs and roof shingles were being blown everywhere in our area. God was speaking through the wind in a way that almost anybody could understand. It created a great backdrop to the message I was teaching, “do you remember what happened last year”? What was God saying in the 9-11 tragedy? I offered this affirmation, “The Lord is calling America back to Him, asking us to repent and He will heal us!” Little did I know or understand at that time, in my first home bible study, I found my message and this message still dominates everything I do and say today!

In deciding to start our home study without the blessing of eldership, I made a clear statement in every way that I was not going to put their frowns on top of my obedience to Christ! I had invested so much time and energy supporting their vision, now it was time to go forward and invest in the Lord's work.

During this time, worship and prayer were my constant retreat. As I worshiped before the Lord I became more and more undone before God's throne. As these times increased, worship and prayer became the core of my spiritual life. I started to listen to some of the latest contemporary worship music, and used these songs to enter the presence of God instead of the hymns I had sung for so many years. While I still loved singing hymns, I sensed that the Spirit of God was pleased with the new sounds that the Body of Christ was authoring through the ministry of His Spirit.

For me it was simple, I just wanted to be part of anything that was real and that touched the heart of God. The churches that I had been connected to my whole life sang out of the very conservative hymnal, through this music I felt the pleasure of the Lord's presence, but now, I sensed that these hymns were not able to be sung in the global church. During this time Michael W Smith made a worship DVD that greatly touched my life. The DVD was simply called "Worship" staged in an arena in Canada, epitomizing what I longed to see in church worldwide! Seeing so many young and old folks from all walks of life worshipping together made me cry!

I started to get to the point where I didn't care what people said anymore, felt that change was a matter of obedience to the leading of God's spirit. I now realize that this was the point when I really started to move in the prophetic as a member of Christ global Body of believers. I believe that the prophet's role in the church is to bring His people back to the way of the message of Jesus, out in the streets where people live and work, this is where Jesus worked, for these He died to make members of His Body. My dad used to quote Spurgeon to me many times when I asked the question, "Why don't we have revival today"? My Dad told me that Spurgeon would say, "**where there are no tears there are no sinners saved**"

The deal breaker for me to leave the church I loved was how we were allowing our young people to become secularized by not giving them holy alternatives in entertainment and worship. We were great at giving them skills to learn and gain head knowledge at our Christian school to invade American life as linguists, corporate managers, philosophers, lawyers, and teachers but we didn't model or mentor them on how to reach a lost and dying generation of kids outside of the institution of our church and those lost in postmodern America.

## **My Reformed Baptist Butt is Cooked!**

By the end of 2001 everything was coming to a head with me and the eldership of the church, whether I really understood it at the time or not, I still was hoping that things would turn for the better. At the same time things at church were really starting to unravel, my mom was dying of cancer. God knew what I needed, at the end of 2001, a sad providence arranged for me and Mom to spend seven weeks together. She fell and cracked her hip at my sister Sara's wedding in December 2001, because of the cancer and the crack in her hip needing time to mend, she was not allowed to sit in a car to go back to PA. During this key time in my life, my mom and I connected like we hadn't ever since I had left home at 21. She spoke into my life in ways that I still don't understand!

Every evening after work I would meet with her to sit with her and discuss my life and read the Bible and pray with her. One night, after reading and praying with her, she spoke a very powerful word into my life

about my future. I was still very passionate about our church and my uncle's AI ministry, I told her that this was where I was called by God to minister, as I said this she gave me the most sincere look and said, **"I don't think this is the place where you should be, you should rather spend time with your uncle David"**. This was not what I wanted to hear.

My uncle David lived and pastored in Chesapeake, VA. His personality was very different from my uncle Al. My uncle David was a pastoral counselor who ministered best one-on-one. He was the kind of pastor that hung out with people and enjoyed life. My uncle Al was always conscious of who he was and how he was supposed to be in every situation he faced publicly. His intense way of being was hard but I had learned to appreciate him and his manner of life. My uncle David was not the public preacher that Uncle Al was, but he was the kind of pastor you could have as a friend. My Uncle David had been in his earlier years a pastor at Penn State University; there he worked with the football team. Many of the football players that I watched on TV were those he ministered to, to me, this was a very cool thing!

Around the time of my mother's death in May of 2002 the atmosphere in my uncle Al's relationship was starting to worsen. As my mother was on the verge of being dismissed, I sensed she was deeply troubled about something when she looked into my eyes. I could see darkness behind them. Her final words to me would launch me forward and preserve God's call on my life, they were this simple promise, 'God will never leave you or forsake you'.

Before her death, my mother had carefully designed her funeral service and told us to conduct her service the way she desired. Before she died she told my family and me that she wanted me to attend the graveside service. I asked my Uncle Al, her oldest brother, to close the time in prayer. As I read the scriptures and shared the words God gave me at her graveside, I noticed the expression on his face was somewhat sour. It was like he was speaking to me through his glaring stare with these words, "what are you doing man, this is my place!"

Over the next couple of months my relationship with my Uncle Al, my spiritual father, was falling to pieces. I believed that he was undermining me behind my back, these impressions were confirmed when my father-in-law and I, a staunch supporter of his church, had an argument about my attitude toward things in the church. It came out of his mouth that 100 people in the church thought I was doing things wrong. Nobody really knew I was struggling with the direction of the church except my two closest friends and my wife. How then did he know anything about me and the church having problems?

During this time a conflict over an interchurch softball game got blown way out of proportion, I was hoping that we could use the softball ministry to reach our kids and outsiders relationally through this ministry. Satan had been allowed to create this division in my relationship with my uncle, I believe, so that I would be hurt and put to the test to see how I would respond. Being 30 years younger than my uncle, and unable to carry much clout within the eldership, I was on a collision course for losing battle of wills with him.

Little did I understand or realize this division was of the Lord. He wanted me to pursue Him first and foremost, not a man who I greatly admired and respected my entire life. You're probably thinking, aren't we supposed to submit to the human government as God's government? Yes, but oftentimes we are under oppression in the church by those who are not able to move Christ's sheep forward to meet the demand of the next generation sinners. Once on the outs with my uncle, my departure would have to be quick or I would lose my mind! I knew that I would be vetted by the elders of the church and punished in a way

where I would not be allowed to coach softball, teach Sunday school, and pray at prayer meetings. This punishment would have caused me literally to lose my mind.

Called to preach at 20 years of age, now 38 years old, still waiting for my hero to give me the nod and public endorsement to preach the Gospel, my patience had run out. Suffering now for several years running from God's call on my life, I was primed by the Lord to just "go" after Him and preach the Gospel. Never did I think my path would lead me to a wild out of the box approach as it has become today, but something was about to break for me, I could sense the depths of my being.

I had trusted my Uncle Al with so many of my big decisions: career, marriage partner, and ministry. During this crazy period in my life, I had my very first personal encounter with Jesus Christ. One day in the late summer of 2002, while meditating on John 10, where Jesus tells his disciples that His sheep hear His voice and they follow Him. As I sat and read this passage I heard for the first time a voice inside my head that to me was the still small voice of God. At that pivotal point, I made a very heart wrenching and gut wrenching decision; I would follow Him no matter what happened!

My wife was going through a very difficult time watching me go through this spiritual struggle with my uncle and at the same time grieve the loss of my mother, she understandably was as upset and confused as I was! She grew up under my uncle preaching, she loved and trusted him. One day after hearing how my reputation seemingly overnight had turned, had turned negative in the church, she decided to take matters into her own hands and tell her pastor and my uncle directly what she thought about things. This was an incredibly big deal for Sharon.

Since my uncle has such a strong personality, I felt like she was going to get eaten up by what every spirit was controlling at this time. In no way did I believe that Sharon was prepared for this encounter. I prayed the whole time she met with him. I couldn't wait for her to come back home. Once she arrived home I anxiously waited to hear what happened. As she started to speak with me she gave me that look like I was the problem, my pride again got the best of me, I thought to myself, I knew it, not his fault or the church's just mine!

As soon as I heard this from Sharon, I got up out of my chair and cried out to God and prayed, "Please keep Sharon and I together" and I prayed, "Lord, all I ask is that you give me my wife and my children, everything else is a bonus". I knew I had never felt so close to God and I knew I heard His Voice that day, so it was either I was going to have a wife or I was going to wander alone for a while.

For the next 2-3 days my wife and I were being tested, she had a choice, she and I would either walk together out of the church or she would stay and I would leave to find my own way. Words can not describe the brokenness I felt during this time in my life. For the entire month of September of 2002 I was a zombie, I would wake earlier than usual, walk downstairs and listen to worship music, cry, and pray! Now I was coming to my senses and God was supplying new strength.

To me, he had gone too far, I felt that he put his name and reputation above my mental and spiritual welfare. Sharon, after 2 days of wrestling with God, decided to walk out with me! I wrote a letter to that effect and walked out of the best reformed Baptist I had ever attended and headed into the wild blue yonder of the unknown.

My life did have some positives, right after my mother died, the Lord took me out of a job in telecommunications that I did not enjoy and launched me back into my own business. I believe that when my mother died and entered that cloud of witnesses, that special grace started to flow into my life supernaturally. She knew that I was called an entrepreneur from my earliest days, I was much happier working inside my own head and issues.

## **It's Finally Over!**

The end of my time in the Reformed Baptist church ended very unceremoniously, it involved a public conflict with me and another coach in front of members of our church that quite frankly was very embarrassing! We had no umpires so we supplied our own, the coach for the other team would umpire many times. In this case, the coach was not umpiring or playing, just sitting on the bench when a play happened in the field that could not be resolved with a simple discussion. This man ran out in the field and got in my face and told me I was wrong (he was on the other team as a player) sensing that things were getting a little testy; I backed down and gave in like I had learned to do with this particular man in past disagreements. This older man was holding back our ability to reach people who thought we were a stiff and hard hearted group of people. His public display of personal bias for his team to the point of embarrassing the cause of Christ, led me to go to the elders of the church to resolve the dispute between the two of us.

Instead of dealing with this hot issue right away, it lingered on for three months, meanwhile tensions mounted in my relationship with the church with people that were not even involved in the conflict. There was something that was operating in the background that I had no clue about. This work was running me down in a public way so that if I walked out on this silly conflict that would have political cover for letting me walk away if that was my choice. Once again my naïveté in these matters got the best of me, I just trusted that the truth would rise to the surface and the matter would be resolved. Little did I know that I was never going to win this battle and that my days at this church were about done!

Finally the meeting I had called for finally came, two of the elders of the church and all of us who were leading the softball ministry came to the meeting, we were told come to the meeting with our view of each member on the leadership team and we would have to be willing to submit to their decision on the matter.

At this meeting we were instructed one by one to offer our honest opinion of our fellow ministry partners. I choose not to say anything negative about the other men involved in our softball ministry. I did not play the game they wanted me to play. As the meeting progressed I got agitated with this method of resolving what to me was obvious. I kept begging my uncle to explain the ultimate purpose for this exercise. His frustration increased as did mine, as we kept things moving I got a real sinking feeling in my stomach, I knew something was going down tonight!

I knew that this meeting was not going to end well, I thought to myself, after about a hour and half of listening to each member speak about what they saw in me and in each other that this was going nowhere, I looked over at a brother who I used to have very close friendship with and asked him a simple question, *"Do you believe me when I say what I say about my motives for doing what I do?"* he looked and me and started to shake his head side to side and said, **"no"**

I looked over at my uncle and said, “*See!*” This meeting didn’t accomplish anything but drive us further apart! I walked out totally disgusted with how my uncle framed the meeting. Instead of dealing directly with the conflict between members in the church, we dealt with how people perceived me after about three months of assault on my character. I now officially hated church politics.

My reputation had been so damaged that my friends no longer believed me when I shared my motivation for helping people or for offering a new approach to how we managed our softball ministry. I was starting to win the hearts of some of the members of the church as a potential leader, now that was in total jeopardy. I had lost any credibility in the church, there was no way I was going to preach in this church, not now, I did not have the heart to start all over at 38 years old where I had been when I was 21. I just could not summon the strength to prove myself to these folks all over again.

## **Submitting to My Call to Preach!**

In September 2002, my time in the Reformed Baptist movement ended, after this meeting I immediately stopped going to Sunday services and started praying about where to go next. I told my family that the same God who has guided us through so many hard times in TX and that guided us through this time in NJ; He will lead us to the place He has for us! We gave our next step to Him and about two days later I discovered a pastor and a church about 1 hour away that was not reformed Baptist but was at the same time open to do aggressive evangelism and newer styles of worship but had an appreciation for our doctrine.

More important than the church I was to attend next was the fact that the Lord was going to introduce to me the most important doctrine I needed; the doctrine of Jesus and the fullness of His Spirit!

The Lord closed the Reformed Baptist door so tight on me that I would never doubt that it was over! The elders of the church sent a letter that clearly stated their assertion that my leaving the way I had left, abruptly, and my prideful behavior at the last meeting would be shared with any Reformed Baptist church I chose to attend from that day forward. All the churches that I had built a relationship with my entire life were now off limits. Ouch!

I was so emotionally damaged and beat up after this experience that I was ready for a totally new direction. So I ran to find refuge in a church that shared my values on evangelism and more contemporary worship but still held a high view of God and Salvation. Within one week the Lord provided us a great place to retreat.

We were led to a group of Calvinistic believers an hour south of our Pompton Lakes home who embraced a more aggressive evangelistic approach in the community and worship that was open and lively. In a short order my family and I were given opportunities to minister to the youth through an AWANA ministry (a 55 year old youth ministry used worldwide to connect kids ages 3-16 with the gospel message). We loved this ministry so much. The church had just purchased an old school bus to pick up kids from the neighborhoods around the Somerset area. It was so much fun to do this ministry with our family and see the kids just having a good time yet learning about Jesus and memorizing scripture.

We also made a positive connection with the worship leader and assisted in helping with morning and evening worship services. The congregation received us warmly, I was given opportunity to teach a couple

of times and mostly everyone responded very positively to my teaching. After the last opportunity to teach, I remember the pastor telling the congregation openly that I would get more opportunities soon.

At this time Sharon got pregnant again with another son, Matthew David. He was born July 28<sup>th</sup> 2004 another big boy weighing in at 9lbs. even, very beautiful with a head of fuzzy blond hair. Sharon loved this addition just like she learned to adjust to the addition of our 2<sup>nd</sup> daughter Becca.

After about 6 months attending this church in Somerset, NJ, we decided to sell our house in Pompton Lakes and move to the neighborhood where the church was located. After selling our home we moved to Somerset, NJ. We leased a 200 year two story colonial home for \$2000/mo. The profits we gathered from the sale of the home in Pompton Lakes were used to get me back into the fire station exhaust removal business I was successful with in the 1990's. The fire station business provided a much greater income potential than anything I was currently trying to do with our business, so after about a three year hiatus, I went back to the industry that had taught me so much about business and life, but also, had hurt me very deeply.

Life in our new church went great for about a year. In the second year things were going so well until I had an encounter with God the Holy Spirit. This encounter would change me forever.

## **My Personal Encounter with the Holy Spirit!**

November 2004, I met and encountered for the first time a real prophet. My friend, Dan Gallo, had been through his own struggle with God and being a good boy in his church. Dan felt like I needed to meet this prophet, he had a positive experience with his prophetic ministry almost two years ago.

The prophet was visiting from Scotland, he was invited to speak and minister at a women's college in Yonkers, NY. Prophet Alan Ross shared his heart on the next generation move of God and the purpose of prophetic ministry. He told me that Alan Ross had prophesied over him two years earlier and everything came to pass as he had prophesied. I was still skeptical but the Lord kept me open just enough to stay and listen to his teaching on prophetic ministry.

The longer I sat listening to Alan speak, the stronger the Lord tugged at my heart. Alan preached from the text in I Cor. 14:1-5 and asked the question, "what is the purpose of prophecy and prophetic ministry for His People". The longer he spoke, the more things started to make sense. I remember looking down at my Bible, staring at the verses in I Cor. 14 and imagining how much it would help if I would receive prophetic ministry right now; if God would just talk to me through a prophet, as I thought of this happening to me I started to cry. What moved me so at this very vulnerable time in my life was seeing something of the real heart of God for His children, just how much He loved us!

A personal word from God the Father is all I wanted and all I needed! This meeting was preceded by a visit about four months earlier by a surprise visit of a man to our Baptist church; I had met him a few years earlier playing softball. He attended our church because He said the Lord had led him to visit our church. Then in a casual conversation with him, after an evening service, he told me that I needed to be open to the work of the Holy Spirit in my life. I remember telling him that no one could do what Paul did today, because Paul had signs and wonders and supernatural revelation, we just have the bible", he then said to me, "that's not necessarily true!". I remember just smiling back at him and not knowing what to say to his assertion.



All my life I had been taught that prophets don't exist anymore in today's church. For me this was all new, yet I knew the Lord guided me to this meeting in Yonkers, NY. Of all places, a college campus, this was His time to teach me something new, I kept saying over and over again, "Lord, why am I here?"

As I listened intently to Alan's teaching, reading the text with him carefully to discern if there was any error in his words, I realized how scared I was to shed my strong views on the Holy Spirit and the supernatural, yet I was excited because I felt like I was going to be exposed to something new in God's plan for my life. I was in a place where I had been so devastated by the hard nosed theology of a God who is austere and distant, unless we were the chosen few that the religious leaders accepted. Now, I was seeing a different side of God, I liked it alot!

After his first teaching session the staff had arranged for a time of personal prophetic ministry. I was really scared now; this guy is going to be able to see right through me, maybe even tell me that I had committed a grave error in leaving the Reformed Baptist Church my uncle pastored. Here I am, a 40 year old religious man learning for the first time that God the Father has a specific work for each of His children to expand His Kingdom.

I listened intently as folks stepped up to receive prophetic ministry. As each individual came up to receive words of encouragement I kept staring down at the text in I Cr 14 and noticed the simple purpose of prophetic ministry. 1Cr.14:3 *"But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification, exhortation, and consolation."* All of Alan Ross's words fit these categories, so I concluded that the Lord is speaking to us through Alan Ross.

How exciting it is for our God, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, to share with us our personal ministry plan? As I listened to Alan prophesy I started to cry more and more, these were truly tears of comfort and joy. I continued to sob quietly to myself, just amazed at how good God is to us and how much He loves His people.

As the weeping continued, I sensed, "Christ actually has a personal plan for people like me?" Something inside me told me that this guy was the real deal, but I still had this feeling that God, through his prophet, was going to send me back to my uncle, I still had so much guilt about how things went there, I just couldn't seem to shake it!

As I walked up to Alan to receive his words, he asked me my name, I said, Jonathan Keener, he thought I said "Reener" not "Keener", he smiled and corrected himself and went on to place his hand on my forehead and said, "reach unreachable people touch untouchable people so says the Lord" **What? Me!** I was going to reach unreachable people? This makes no sense! Then he went on to describe many of my struggles and the personal devastation I had just experienced in the church I left. Alan confirmed that though I had experienced my broken relationships, the relationships that I had built over the years with people were blessed and God used me in the lives of people. The most amazing thing the Lord spoke to me was that me and my family – **"were in the palm of His Hands!"**

As Alan continued to prophesy, the Lord revealed that time was going to come someday when He would heal my wounds because He heals the brokenhearted and sets the captives free. The next season in my life will be, **"things running their course"**.

As for my calling, Alan continued to identify my target market, "those that hate Me, those involved in the occult, and those who run from Me and addicted to pornography"

The prophecy concluded with, "**Because you have experienced pain more than most people, you are a candidate to reach the unreachable and touch the untouchable so says your God.**" I felt the Lord's touch and voice, I continued to sob openly in front of the folks who heard the prophecy. As I stumbled back to my seat in disbelief, someone handed me the tape of the prophecy.

I could tell that everyone in attendance felt like something very powerful was going on inside of me and in the room. For years, I resisted the work of the Holy Spirit in my life, I didn't believe in the second work of grace or the baptism of the Holy Spirit, now I was being blessed by someone who I would have never paid any attention to earlier in my life.

I called Sharon and told her that I had just received an amazing prophecy. I told her to come to the next session; I could tell she was scared. Since she didn't want to come I headed home to New Jersey with the tape of the prophecy in hand. Later that night I played the tape of the prophecy for my wife. After she listened to the tape, she was amazed and scared by the implications of the prophetic word I had received from this perfect stranger from Scotland.

I was excited and I too was scared, our doctrinal teaching and practice had no place for this kind of ministry, we were somewhat skeptical. Knowing that the Bible teaches that we are test all things, I brought the tape to my pastor for his review and consultation. In the back of my mind I also had the sense that I would also help others get free in the days to come!

For about a month I waited for my pastor to respond to the words on the tape. I was hoping against hope that he would listen and believe that the prophecy was from God. After about a month of no response, I called and asked him for his thoughts. Surprisingly, he barely gave me a response; his view on the ministry of the Holy Spirit would not allow him to receive this work of God's grace in my life. This broke my heart again!

I was welling up inside of me to find a man who could help me with my new calling; I knew that I was called to something I had never witnessed in my life. I felt a pressure from the Holy Spirit to keep searching the Word of God to get a biblical understanding of what happened in Yonkers, NY. I read books written by Smith Wigglesworth and John G Lake. None of my pastors ever shared with me the ministries of these men who moved in the supernatural. Was I going to be able to pass the test with the Lord and move outside of my comfort zone and try things that were way beyond my natural mind? In the prophecy the Lord said, "I was a **candidate** to reach the unreachable and touch the untouchable, I knew I was not ready yet!

The first church I contacted to share my experiences with were the folks at Sovereign Grace Ministries in Gaithersburg, MD. I found out about these folks from our worship leader who attended their worship conferences. They believed that the supernatural gifts were still active today and they had the same Calvinistic doctrine that I had heard my whole life. I believed that we were going to find refuge in their denomination.

Sovereign Grace Ministries seemed to have all the answers to our questions without going radically to the extreme of all out charismania with its health-wealth-prosperity propaganda; this move was fairly safe and comfortable. I researched their confession of faith and their teaching as fast as I could. I called the pastor

of the closest S. G. church. We spoke at length on the phone; he made a good first impression as I shared with him my struggle to find my calling in the Lord. After this long conversation I decided to give him a shot.

So we packed all the kids and drove about a little over an hour south to Cherry Hill, NJ to attend the S. G. church that was temporarily using a local public high school for services. The first time we went I felt the presence of God, I had a beautiful time of worship there. After attending for about a month, I got the sense that they were similar in structure to the Reformed Baptist. They had a strict ministerial vetting process which I was not ready to deal with, for me; I could not continue to wait for them to figure out over an extended period of time what to do with me. I had spent almost my entire adult life trying to prove my calling to the Reformed Baptists and then the John MacArthurites, I could not muster the strength to do this again.

## **Direct Encounters with Spiritual Darkness**

During this time of spiritual disconnection from my pastor, dark things were happening in the church. One Sunday morning our pastor's wife looked at me with a very strange look while I was on the stage worshipping the Lord during a morning worship service. As I can best recollect, she too was going through a very difficult time personally with her daughter, who was pregnant out of wedlock. While we were singing a worship song on the stage, she was right in front of us. I noticed that she was staring at me with these very strange eyes. It didn't even look like she was looking at me with her eyes, but some mysterious force outside of her. I had never seen this before; I had to look away because if I continued to look at her eyes, I felt like I was going to be pulled into something very sinister and dark.

I had an even more drastic encounter a couple of months earlier, this time in my bedroom. The experience went something like this: I woke up suddenly in the middle of the night and opened my eyes in an atmosphere of darkness like I had never felt or seen before. At the end of my bed stood a large being with a cape over its head, I could not make out its face; It had the appearance of something out of the Star Wars movie.

This very imposing hooded being just stood and stared at me while lying on my bed. I sensed something was in the room but I could not move. I picked my head up off the bed; my body was frozen and stayed stuck to the bed for about an hour and half. I just laid them stiff as a board; I couldn't recite any scripture or summon the strength to speak to tell this evil spirit to leave the room. My wife slept through the entire encounter. Somehow after about one and half hours I was released from this dark encounter and was able to get up and out of bed so I went downstairs to read and pray and things just went back to normal.

## **Where is my "Resting" Place?**

Hebrews 4:9 says, *"There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God"*. The Lord was working a new thing into my analytical mind. He made it hard for me to stay comfortable; I knew that stepping out of my comfort zone was the only option.

Sometime in the spring of 2004 the Lord spoke simply to me the word, "land" while I was driving through the Catskill Mountains in upstate NY. I started to seriously think that our growing family needed to have land to grow food in case things got bad in America. With my relationship with my pastor souring, and still

smarting from my separation from my Uncle Al, I determined that I take my large clan **“anywhere”** to find the solace and rest I so longed for.

At this time my business enabled me to have many hours of driving time alone. Driving for hours at a time, I would pray and share my heart issues with my God. It was during these times that the Lord confirmed the word, **“land”!** My business covered the east coast of the USA, I had the freedom to search for new work anywhere on the east coast. So I prayed over the states on the east coast where I could expand our product line. We had no representatives in the southeast from North Carolina to Florida.

We were still attending the church in Somerset, NJ. My wife and kids were very happy in this smallish community Baptist church, but the pastor and I were not speaking. We visited the church in Cherry Hill and we were not sensing this to be the Lord’s direction for us, so naturally I was asking the Lord quite vociferously, **“Where do you want me to go, where Lord?”** Everything always starts out well for me in churches but they are ending horribly now! My last true pastor and I did so many things together, now he was avoiding me!

I knew the day came for us to leave on a particular Sunday morning somewhere around February 2005. While my pastor was preaching through the book of I John; he made several references to those who are to be identified as “false” prophets or teachers in the local church, it felt like I was the one he was referring to by the way he described how they look when they walk through the door of the church. They smile nice, they have great family life, they minister and worship, but their teaching is not biblical. They are seeking to hoodwink the body of Christ to follow erroneous teaching.

As I listened to these words and noticed that he was speaking to the elders of the church, everything inside of me was screaming, **“It's you, man, he is speaking about you!”** I wanted so badly to get up and walk out of the sanctuary, but by God’s grace, I didn’t. My heart was broken inside, if the Lord hadn’t touched me supernaturally earlier that morning I would have stood up and spoke directly to him while he was standing in the pulpit! But the Lord visited me that morning with something I wanted Him to touch me with, but did not expect it to happen under these circumstances.

## **My “Fire” Baptism into Jesus Christ!**

Early that same Sunday morning, I got this sense that sin was in the church and I needed to confront it publicly. I kept thinking to myself, I have never stood up in a church service and interrupted it to say a “word” from God. I told my wife that something was going on inside of me and I did not know if this was the morning that I was called to stand up in the church and call someone in the church to repentance.

While I was taking my shower, I had my deepest encounter with Christ ever! There were weird personal conflicts happening in the church that seemed to be coming out of nowhere. I was in over my head. So with these frustrating thoughts spinning through my mind and heart I started to pound on the wall of the shower and cried out with these words, *“I hate these assignments, Lord! I just want to be normal”.*

I had read about Smith Wigglesworth’s baptism in the Holy Spirit earlier in the year and how his baptism in the Holy Spirit changed his entire ministry. His ministry went from dull and listless to a very supernatural ministry filled with signs and wonders. I was open now like never before, I knew that I needed something more to effectively serve the Lord and reach the “unreachable” for Him. I was ready to receive this baptism of fire, I just knew I needed more power to deal with the darkness that was coming against me. I

needed more power to preach to the people I was sent to minister His truth, I was put on the shelf by those men of God that I had known through my years of actively serving the Lord in the church, I was so broke inside I couldn't stand it.

As I continued to take my shower to prepare for this encounter in the church, I kept telling the Lord my displeasure of my circumstances, I kept getting more sincere in my anger toward God the Father. I kept pounding on the wall of the shower crying, *"make me normal so I can blend in!"* As I continued to pound on the wall of our shower, a flash of heat surged through my body and I fell straight to the ground. I began to mutter under my breath in a strange tongue. As I continued to mutter these strange words I saw Jesus off in the distance riding on a beautiful white horse riding very fast above the circle of the earth turning hard to the left as He rode above the earth. I was on a horse right behind Jesus and was struggling to keep up with Him because He was moving so fast.

I kept telling the Lord I would follow Him and began to weep and cry out, *"I will follow you, I will follow you!"* I wondered and kept wondering in my heart, "what did I say when I spoke in tongues?" I asked the Lord what had happened to me, the assurance He gave me was that I had complied with His wishes to follow Him, I wasn't off track, I was following Him and He was moving real fast!

## **Our Refuge in NC?**

One Sunday morning not long after this last dark encounter at the church, I heard a radio commercial on a local Christian station about a ministry that specialized in helping people find their spiritual gifts. One Sunday morning while I was sitting at my kitchen table studying the Bible alone, maybe a week or two after the Holy Spirit encounter, after feeling very unwelcome at church, I had decided to stop going to the church and sit and read the Bible and pray alone at the house which happened to be right next to the church we were attending.

It was on this Sunday morning while sitting alone and listening to the local Christian radio station that I heard of this Spirit-filled ministry. Right away I called the number and Carlos Lopez answered the phone. He was not able to meet with me that Sunday, but encouraged me to come to his home anyway so that his family could pray for me. After I told my wife what I heard from Carlos and that I really wanted to see his family right away. As I walked into his home his daughters and their husbands were there to greet me. At once I felt the presence of God all over the house, Carlos's daughters prayed for me and I went home.

Later on that week, Carlos and I got together. Carlos introduced me to Global Harvest Ministries in Denton, TX. Carlos was planting an apostolic church about 50 minutes from our home in NJ. Carlos was the first man of God to tell me about apostolic ministry. He explained for the first time in my life that the fivefold ministry mentioned in Eph. 4:8-12 was relevant for today's very dead church. He explained the purpose of the modern day apostle. I have never forgotten his words to me. For the next few weeks I sought to learn more from Carlos by attending his house church in Middletown, NJ. This was a very productive time in my life. Sharon and the kids all received prophetic ministry from Carlos and his family.

After just a couple of meetings with Carlos, he called me after an intense night with God the Holy Spirit, he told me that the Lord awakened him with words for me. He wanted to get together so he could speak with me and my calling from the Lord. Right after I hung up the phone with Carlos we met at a restaurant by his house in Middletown, NJ. Carlos personally wanted to read over the prophetic word that the Spirit had

revealed to him. This revelation brought more depth to the word I had received from Alan Ross a few months earlier.

The main thrust of this word of revelation (he wrote it down and I still have it with me today), had to do with me being a father to the next generation apostles and prophets. I was being called to build a training center for the next generation leaders to equip them to serve the body of Christ. I had told Carlos of my plans to move to NC, but he thought I should wait for 6 months to get more training in apostolic ministry. The problem with staying was that we had already signed the paperwork to purchase our land. Again I did not want to walk away from this property and the people who were selling the land did not give me anymore time to extend our closing. Add to this reality was the fact that my wife was not comfortable with Carlos yet!

## **Our Introduction to Pilot Mountain**

After some prayer, I started to focus on selling our product in NC. Amazingly, a door opened for me to sell my product to King Fire Dept. They accepted the \$60,000 deal totally on the phone, which is quite unusual. In January of 2005 I planned to bring my entire family to King, NC to survey the area. I started to think this may be the place the Lord is preparing for me. I knew if King, NC was to be our place of dwelling then I wanted my entire family with me so they could see it for themselves.

In the back of my mind I had a feeling that something was going to happen while we were there so I was preparing my heart for a big move. My wife Sharon and I felt a strong pull to NC, but she was a little scared of moving 10 hours away from family and their support. We now had five children, Jenna -12, Rebecca – 10, Makayla – 7, Seth – 3, and Matthew – 1 years old.

Then right before we were to leave for NC, Sharon had a very inexplicable panic attack about driving to NC. She thought it was too far, she wouldn't make it! She had a nice new car, a Ford Excursion, which was very safe. So this was an unusual response, to me, this represented another demonic encounter.

I called some of our church friends and had them pray for Sharon, eventually she was released from this crippling fear and the next day we headed off to King, NC. We drove the 10 hour trip praying for divine guidance the whole way, hoping that this was the place where the Lord was guiding us. I kept asking the Lord while we were driving, was this "the land" you were telling me about on those long business trips?

This trip along the I-78 & I-81 corridor enabled us to see some of the prettiest land on the east coast. As we headed out NJ through the Shenandoah Valley of PA, MD, WV, and VA and continued on to NC to cross over the Blue Ridge Mountains, anticipation was building in my heart. As we came down the North Carolina side of the Blue Ridge Mountains, we looked down and were blown away by the gorgeous landscape we saw.

At somewhere approaching 5000 ft above sea level and looking down toward the east to topography was gorgeous. Our eyes were filled with scene after scene of many beautiful landscapes with rolling hills and cute little towns in between.

As a lover of the Old Testament accounts of faith, I felt like Joshua looking at the land of Canaan for the first time. Could it be all that we hoped it would be? For Joshua it was better than he had hoped, Joshua probably couldn't wait to tell Moses what was up in Canaan. I'm confident that Joshua dreamed from that

day forward about one day living in and raising his family in places that he saw on his first trip. For 40 years he had to wait and for me it had been about 20 years.

On the first day of our project at King FD, a young Firefighter told us to check out a town called Pilot Mountain. The next day this same firefighter graciously came back to the fire station and handed me a piece of paper with a phone number of a local real estate agent who was selling a 24 acre tract of land right by his home on Carson Rd. So quicker than I could have imagined we were looking at properties in the Pilot Mountain area.

The first property I looked at was mostly wooded and nestled on the edge of this property was a little house. After bringing Sharon to see the place, hoping that she would be excited, she showed no excitement, the house was too small and there were too many trees around the house which made her feel uncomfortable. The funny thing is my wife is not a nature girl and I was looking for nature and farm land, what a step of faith for Sharon? To me my wife is the greatest miracle of my life. She has had to put up with so much change and disruption in our life together.

With her glances of displeasure and realizing that this property would be a lousy choice for a house and seven people, we began to look for other properties with only qualifier being that we have at least 10 acres of land, the location would have to be close enough to a town that we could be a part of the community, and 4 bedrooms fit our growing family.

Sharon decided to take the house hunting project over, I was thankful that she was engaged in the search for our destiny. After all, no matter what men think, the women pick the house where the family lives. Committed to showing me how to look for a house, she decided to find a house that was more suited for all of us, girls included.

Only two properties meet our criteria, The first property we looked at had a smallish but had newer house with 10 acres of land that had a beautiful view of Pilot Mountain, but we both agreed that it wouldn't work because the location was surrounded by wild land growth, single wides, and steep drop-offs on the back side of the property.

We went to the next and final property that fit our criteria. As I traveled through a cute gate and slowly rolled down the gravel driveway that led to a beautifully nestled home, I felt a strong pull to the land surrounding the home. As we looped through a circle driveway and parked in front of the house, the kids jumped out of the car and started running all over the property. We were surrounded by the loveliest rolling hills I had ever seen.

This first glance at the property reminded me of the rolling hills of PA on that dairy farm where I used to play in the woods and splash in the creek. My mind was opening up to God's hand in all this. I had pushed my past farm life out of my mind for almost 20 years, but now it was all coming back to me. I looked at my little boys and thought to them, "Wouldn't it be great if they have the same kind of simple childhood I had?"

While Sharon checked out the 2200sq. ft. house to see if she could fit us into the place, the kids and I ran around the property, searching for fun things to do. As Sharon observed the kids, we looked at each other and sensed it would work. Before we left I prayed for instruction to know what God wanted for this land. I

simply asked the Lord, "why here?" As I prayed the Lord wove these words into my thoughts, "rest, renewal, and restoration"

These words fit my heart. I had experienced so much trouble in my life. From the age of 12 to this time in my life, it seemed I was always in a conflict or surrounded by one. If anyone needed to rest it was me and Sharon!

As we continued to investigate what God was showing us in the land, my mind went deeper back into the best days of my early childhood. The land so much reminded me of my early years growing up on the dairy farm. These early years were the best years of my childhood. As we moved further away from the house we discovered a cute little creek just like the one I used to play in as a kid.

I so wanted the simple life for my children, the same kind of life I had when I was a child. I remembered the horrors of Sept, 11 2001 and how it affected my wife and I, and my oldest daughters. I remembered what I said to my Lord that day. I reminded myself of the promise I had made to the Lord telling Him I would do whatever He led me to do to bring positive change to the people of America. Repentance breaks the yoke, but I was sensing that our nation was still in great danger. I felt like God was telling me to "prepare a place" for them.

As the fire station project drew to a close, I was hoping to finish everything by the weekend, but we were missing a small part of our electrical control panel that forced us to stay through the weekend in Winston-Salem. The weather turned horrible, a tremendous ice storm hit the entire area, forcing everyone to stay home. All Sunday services were canceled, I was hoping to visit the churches to discern the best church for us to attend if we were to move to NC. Not making any spiritual connections was a disappointment, but the delay allowed us to have one more peak at the property we hoped to buy.

On our way back to NJ we went back by the property we wanted to buy, to see it one more time. This time we noticed a for sale sign on the property next to the house property we were considering to purchase. We called the real estate agent to find out what was included in this property. A saw a barn on the front side of the property, but had no idea about the backside of the property.

On our way back to NJ, Sharon and I decided to buy the land with the house and an adjacent property of 11 acres with the old barn on it! So with little knowledge of Pilot Mountain we kept our hearts fixed on the King FD project. After we made this decision, Abraham became my new hero. I meditated on his life a lot during these days of transition. Gen 12:1 *"Get up and leave your country and go to a place I have prepared for you."*

## **Our Move to Pilot Mountain**

Right before I brought the entire family to NC I took a load of furniture in my truck and trailer to lighten the next load with the entire family. When I got to the land I decided to walk all around these beautiful pastures and ask the Lord why I was here. As I walked through the meadows and prayed, the Lord started to whisper into my ear Ps 37:3,4 *"Dwell in the land and feed on His faithfulness, Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart."*

I kept meditating on these verses and looking over the land we had not seen back in January. I had not realized that the additional 11 acres we had attached to the purchase of the original property we had



accessed was more beautiful than I had realized. It was lined by a small creek to the right and at the bottom of the hill it was connected to Tom's Creek. I ran through the water just like a little kid, I was so excited! I really felt like I was home. I went back so excited to bring Sharon down to our new home in Pilot Mountain.

So in May of 2005 we moved our family to the town of Pilot Mountain, NC. While we waited to move we kept praying for the Lord to confirm His Word to us, I asked Him to slam the door in our face if He did not want us in Pilot Mountain. We started to intercede for the area and sensed that something special was being prepared for Pilot Mountain, NC. I kept sensing this was going to be a divine gathering place.

Sharon's family and my family acted like we were moving to the other side of the world. They totally acted out of character, we had moved to Texas in 1996 and they blessed that move, but this time it was more like cursing us rather than blessing our decision. Even our very positive relational local church started to act out of character; they even tried to approach Sharon without me to influence our decision to stay in NJ. My pastor and I had patched up our differences but he was very against our move away even though he knew I was spiritually heading into a new direction. We were under attack for sure but God kept us moving forward. This represented our fourth encounter of demonic interference while trying to obey the prophetic word given by Alan Ross.

We moved to Pilot Mtn in May of 2005 believing and hoping that there would be people on the ground waiting for us to help them build a refuge for the Kingdom of God. What we found was a spiritual desert. We visited church after church seeking people who felt that God was up to something in Pilot Mountain. No pastor seemed to get what was going on in our spirit.

I later came to see how the demonic strongholds had held back the work of revival in the Pilot Mountain area for several decades using religious lies and brokenness in family relationships. The enemy long ago did not allow the folks who formed the town to have that vital and living relationship with Christ that has its own contagion. When we learned about the prevalence of freemasonry in the town we found that the three mainline churches that most people attend were being run by the masons.

Pilot Mountain was my first exposure to the work of the freemasons. I started to read books on freemasonry to figure out their views on salvation and the gospel message. I remembered my original prophetic words, "those involved in the occult" and "those that hate God" . I started to see that this was one of the reasons why I was sent to Pilot Mountain. I met a Baptist preacher who came against masons in his church to warn them to leave the cult. The man was severely attacked by the masons. Now after an incredible struggle he has the fastest growing church in our county. The masons got him another way though, infiltrating his doctrine and teaching. This man believes in the succession of spiritual gifts. His youth is very worldly and carnal. So while his church is growing and has the appearance of success, he doesn't quite see the way the enemy came in unawares to infiltrate his church with seeds of a different kind of tare.

Most of the people who wanted a real connection with God on Sunday morning headed out of town every Sunday morning to attend churches where they felt more spiritual life, which seems to leave Pilot Mountain to the dogs. There is one man who is standing against all the aforementioned spirits but he has other demons attacking him. His weariness and anger have beset him to the point where it is hard for him to get his bearings.

## **More Deep Encounters with the Spirit of Christ**

On a certain day in the summer of 2005 I had a time with the Lord that was very different than any I had before. On this Saturday I felt that everything in my life was right. When I walked I felt like I was walking on a cushion of air. As I played with my kids I felt like me and the Father were playing along with them. I had incredible patience where I didn't have patience. At the end of the day I sensed that I was supposed to write down the experiences of the day. As I wrote, I fell into a trance. In this trance I felt that the Lord's presence was so thick in the house that I would soon open my eyes and the Lord would be right in front of me. I was scared too, so I was afraid to open my eyes and decided to sit and let whatever was going on around me just happen. As I turned to my left I heard a whisper from the Spirit which simply said, "later". I took this to mean that sometime later on in my life I would see the Lord.

Right after we moved to Pilot Mountain I decided to attend, at the end of May, a Morningstar conference in Fort Mill, SC they named, "Spiritual Warfare". The other conference was later on in November with Global Harvest at an apostolic church in Greensboro, NC where Otis Lockett labors. The experience of this conference was unique. The worship was wide open and loose, yet deeply spiritual. The man, who spoke, Francis Frangipane, was very good at explaining the way to win the battle of the mind in our battles against Satan and his kingdom. I received more prophecies from their prophets. The words I remember were regarding my son, "who I was told to love with all my heart so that years later, he would know how much the Father loved him" The other prophetic word had to do with PA. Many of my relatives lived there so I didn't know how to receive this word.

About 2 months later, I had a dream one night in which I was driving on what seemed to be an interstate highway, the road turned upward for a long distance. The sun was setting in the distance over the brow of the incline. As I approached the horizon a head-on collision occurred that transported me out of the vehicle and up into the heavens. Shortly after the collision I was lost in the brightness of the sun.

After my time in the brightness came back to see things on earth, I saw a dog running and playing with some children and a discussion about why the dog was there. I was speaking with some people about where the dog was from and why it was with this family. The conclusion was that the father who was taken was connecting with his kids through the dog.

Five days later my cousin who lives in Lancaster, PA died in a car accident. I could not make the connection from the word I received at the conference and help the situation be averted, so I did not provide any warning to my cousin. In fact, I thought the prophecy was about my future, I even took out a life insurance policy for a million dollars to assist my wife and to care for the children.

My cousin Dan left behind a grieving wife and 3 beautiful children. At the funeral I had the opportunity to speak to Dan's oldest daughter, Brittney, who had just started college at Syracuse University in New York State. At the funeral I shared with her the dream. After hearing this account she cried, I hoped that the dream and the account of the dog would encourage her. After this conversation I knew my work at the funeral was complete so my wife and I headed back to NC.

## **What Church am I supposed to be a part of?**

The latter part of 2005 through the first half of 2006 we attended a church that believed in the supernatural and faith to heal sickness, but they had a freemason in leadership. One Sunday, during the

time of worship, I passed a note to one of the elders of the church stating that the Spirit wanted to release this man from this connection to freemasonry. The elder did nothing with this word, so I started to believe that this was not the church that we were supposed to be a part of to cover our calling in Pilot Mtn.

Toward the end of 2005 I attended another conference on spiritual warfare in Greensboro, NC. I sensed that this conference was going to assist me in understanding more about territorial spiritual warfare, a subject that I never really understood or studied. The main speakers at this conference were Otis Lockett, Peter Wagner, Chuck Pierce, and Dutch Sheets. The people were different than the folks I met at the Morningstar conference. I sensed in the Morningstar culture more of a suspicion about people they meet for the first time. With this group of people I felt a more open atmosphere.

After a 3-day Global Harvest conference in November 2005, I sensed God strengthening my resolve to believe for change in Pilot Mountain. At the end of the conference Dutch Sheets prayed for all the pastors and gospel laborers in NC, which were in attendance, that the Spirit of God would open the heavens and release the supernatural in all the cities of NC. The day the conference ended I went to each room in our home to anoint the doors and windows with oil to rid our house of any familiar spirits associated with our house from the several families that had lived there over its 50 years of existence

The next day I decided to make a fence around our pasture for our neighbor's pony. While I was hammering fence posts into the ground at the edge of our horse pasture the hammer fell back out of my grip and swung down and hit the top of my head so hard I fell to the ground. Our dog, Rocky, came running over to me and licked me to see if I was OK. As I got up, I realized I had blood running down my face. I staggered back to the house, when the kids saw me they started screaming frantically, I looked horrible. I found afterward that they all went in the backyard to pile on top of the trampoline to pray for me. My wife, Sharon, came out to see what was going on. Once she saw the blood running down my face she too was frightened, I assured her that I was going to be fine and asked her to pray for me.

She prayed over me as she rinsed the blood out of my hair, as she prayed the Lord brought peace and healing to me and the wound. I did have a tremendous backache the next day. It hurt so bad I could not stand up straight. Standing in the kitchen I just prayed that He who is in me is greater than he who is in the world. The Lord healed me as I was singing worship songs in the shower.

I have prayed many prayers of deep intercessions and prophetic words flow to me in the shower. I believe it is connected to the call on my life to be a priest, the Levitical priest was to attend constantly to the worship of the temple of God. A part of the priestly duty was to regularly cleanse their bodies in a "mikvah bath". This responsibility was important to their call to keep themselves pure before the presence of the Lord. Later on as I continued to pursue my calling in the Lord I came to see that my calling was like those priests in Israel who also prophesied while they offered sacrifices to the Lord.

The Global Harvest conference also initiated another deep encounter with the Father. On November 22<sup>nd</sup> 2005, I experienced the first download of a direct word from the Father about my calling. At 9am, after I had been reading and praying, I felt a tangible touch of The Spirit prompting me to pray in the spirit, I was sitting alone in the house so I started to pray aloud in tongues with more fervor than I had felt at any time earlier in the morning.

As I cried out in tongues I would then write in English in the words that were said in the spirit. I wrote until my hand grew weary from writing. I looked down and saw that I had written about four pages of words which I realized I had waited so long for from the Father.

After reading through these words, I realized they answered the deepest cries of my heart going back to the early days of my childhood. The words made the most difficult question that had yet to be answered, *“was I called to preach?”* With all the problems I was having waiting in the church for a pulpit ministry to emerge, I had all but given up a preaching ministry. I knew the Lord was calling me to walk my calling out in a different way than other men of God, I just thought maybe I was supposed to help my boys become the preachers that really spoke the truth of Christ and His Gospel.

These words rang so loud, for so long I wondered if I was going crazy or was the Lord actually calling me to preach. Did I actually know the Word of God enough to preach? He told me. “Preach His Word and only His Word because the people need to hear His Word!” so clear, yet very hard to do and believe in the flesh. They were words I had waited to hear for years from my Father in heaven.

Another significant part of this prophecy to me was the call to plant, nurture, and sow His people. This word was necessary for the next season of my call. I commanded to Plant churches or ministries, father and mentor young men, and sow the seed of His truth.

Added to this very difficult work was a call to unify His people, to fight and stand for the unification of His Bride. This was way more than I could handle. To stand for unity in my own extended family was hard enough, but then to guide others to unity would be more than I could handle?

I was told by some prophets, back in May that Sharon and I were called to the ministry of reconciliation. First I had to deal with my own reconciliation issues with my uncle and former pastor. I had internal strife with Sharon’s dad, my own father and I were not on the same page, and all my sisters thought I was a little over the deep end. Some of my closest friends in the churches that had attended had deserted me. I wanted reconciliation more than I could explain to anyone because division had always been a part of my family and our church life.

Finally, I will share that this prophecy called me to move in the arts, business, and government. The Lord spoke to me that the land, arts, economy, and government all belonged to Him. Later on these words of instruction would manifest in a ministry we launched called “takin back the streets for Jesus”. In this ministry we sing, dance, pray and preach in the streets claiming the promise that the earth is the Lords and all its fullness.

The Father told me that His people are confused by a confused kingdom understanding. The health, wealth, and prosperity doctrine does not take into account the call to die to owning the material stuff of this world, rather we must understand that all the stuff belongs to Him, and we should share His stuff with each other in community. This renewed kingdom understanding later manifested in the ministry we started called, “Livin Lattes Café”.

The sowing and planting ministry that we call Livin Lattes International Fellowship, a nonprofit corporation sole, has the nothing but the expansion of God’s kingdom through planting house and café churches, attached to this is a training academy for the next generation prophets and apostles commissioned to spread the Gospel all over the world.

## **A “David” Anointing**

Another intense encounter with the Lord occurred on December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2005, at 6:30am, as I prayed I felt a lift in my spirit and heart higher than ever before, I sensed that I was being lifted to a place in the heavenlies that I had never been before. I felt as though I was at the place of Christ’s throne, once there at the throne of Christ, I sensed His Word coming to me asking me specifically this question, *“What do you want Me to do for you?”*

Being quite sobered by the experience, I simply prayed that He would release the devils from the region and send His spirit to Pilot Mountain and beyond. After this request, I received another clear word about my calling. The amazing thing about God is He communicates to us through our earth name and since my given name is Jonathan *“David”* Keener, the Lord told me that my years as a *“Jonathan”* were ending and now He was releasing to me the same kind of spirit that was released to His servant David.

Yet another wild and over my earthly understanding revelation! Wow, this was a ridiculous word for me to hear, it was taking me to a place that I had never experienced. God’s touch was so heavily on my heart that all I could do was let these words hover around my heart. I didn’t know what to do! I remembered the teaching I had received from Alan Ross, the prophet who first opened this door to the voice of God in my life. That the Spirit of Christ will send personal words to us to edify, encourage, and comfort His saints. This word did not seem like it would help Satan’s kingdom, so I deduced that this must have been heaven sent and worthy to meditate on and to obey.

Now armed with a vision and confirming word from the Father, I sensed that things were going to change in Pilot Mountain. These words made it clear to me that one day The Lord wanted me to preach the gospel to people of Pilot Mountain.

## **Christ – The Healer of the Broken Heart**

Reconciliation is a big part of God’s work in my life. His way is to let me suffer from the devastation of broken relationships and then work on my heart to heal these wounds with powerful love and godly example. An example of this happened in early 2006; I had a last minute business trip to Jacksonville FL. On the way I got a word from God that prepared me for the purpose of the trip. You will *“reconcile”* with your old boss was the sense I received from the Spirit of God. I saw myself shaking hands with a man who basically put me into bankruptcy with lies and shrewd dealings.

After I arrived and set up our demo and put out our literature, I got a visit from one of my old boss’s partners, Scott Thomas and shortly thereafter I received a visit from his wife. I started to soften to the idea that I had to meet with my old boss, Wayne Lutz eventually, a man who hurt me so badly in TX, a man who cost me an opportunity to make millions of dollars. Yet the Lord wanted me to go and shake his hand. Once I made the decision to go and greet him, the rest was easy. The entire walk to his show booth at the expo was completely supernatural, I walked with a grin on my face, seeing Wayne. I walked right up to him and shook hands like I was shaking the hand of an old friend.

## Out of Bounds – Café Church Planting!

The only lead I got out of this show was from the Savannah Fire Department in Savannah GA. On the way home I stopped in Savannah to see the fire stations to offer a quote to fix their diesel exhaust systems. I saw a Christian Bookstore on the way to the station and stopped in for a visit. I bought several books that day, but one of the books I purchased that day would unlock the key to a door that God had directed to go through in the town of Pilot Mountain. The book was titled, "out of bounds church" by Steve Taylor. In the book, Steve Taylor describes what churches were doing in spiritually dead Europe to reach the unchurched, how he and his church adjusted the entire presentation of their church to the public to make positive connections with unchurched travelers they were seeking to reach.

He concluded that we need to overhaul the traditional church model to reach the unchurched of our day. They are so disconnected from the basic understanding of scripture that we can make no assumptions that they understand where Genesis is and that God created everything in creation with the word of His mouth. He spoke of the idea that seekers are "travelers" looking for truth. That young people are more interested in value and meaning in life than material things.

I started to think about how we could reach the travelers in Pilot Mountain who were seeking truth and wanting a new set of values for their generation. What Steve Taylor called, "cafe church" where he modeled the interior of their church with stations where different types of people could receive the message of faith in Christ through a variety of means. A station with a music listening area, books that were geared for those who never heard the gospel account, and art work that expressed truth through visual communication. They had food and drink as well to draw people into their building. I decided after meditating on this teaching and the Lord's earthly ministry that the last thing a southern town needed was another steeped church.

As I shared this vision with folks I got no real traction with the ministers in Pilot Mountain or in the surrounding communities. The idea was restoration of the bride of Christ. The idea I had was not to compete with the local churches but rather to join them together with the common appreciation of a good cup of coffee and a nice café atmosphere.

Another reality that still hadn't sunk in yet for me was that Pilot Mountain was overrun with Masonic teaching and these high ranking Masonic leaders kept new Works of Grace and public preaching off the street by their secret incantations and false spirituality. We were also warring with a strong tradition in the south of fear mongering and strict religiousness about the King James Version being the only acceptable version that is God breathed. There was so much division as well among the Baptist churches.

After some prayer and meditation I made a serious heartfelt commitment to plant a café church in the early part of 2006. We would open a coffee shop to preach the message of Christ's love by creating a loving and warm café that would be open for all to walk in and take a load off.

If we could have done it all over again knowing what we know now I would not have done the café church as I did it, all alone! But with these deep revelations just coming to me about my calling I walked through my fears and made the decision to proceed alone.

This way was hard for me to accept, I had been taught that only churches send and only churches plant other churches. I was not able to get another church, including the one we were in to buy into the idea that we were in the will of God.

Pilot Mountain made no sense for a trendy coffee shop with contemporary worship music. So much of the area was still steeped in tradition and the old time religion that we were gonna be viewed with suspicion. This work would only receive tremendous opposition from the traditional churches and our neighbors. But a traditional church would also be met with resistance because there are so many of them in the south and in Pilot Mountain.

I looked at several downtown locations but landed on the best most attractive downtown location not far from the center of town -- 105 W. Main Street. The building was a restored 105 year old, three story building that just had two restaurants open and close in the previous two years of operation. Because it was centrally located and very attractive to us and others, Sharon and I chose this site for "Livin Lattes Café".

For several years our landlord and others were buying and restoring the older building on Main Street. The restoration in the physical corresponded with the spiritual restoration we envisioned, we saw this physical work as a clue from the Lord to proceed with this spiritual work of planting a unique church gathering place. We saw downtown Pilot Mountain as a great place to build a beautiful, warm, congenial and old timey feel for our cafe. While there was potential for good business, many thought we were crazy to attempt such a trendy café in such a change-resistant town. Many of the people did not even know what a latte was, leaving alone the idea of a "livin" latte!

Only God could make this happen for our family. If God led me here from NJ to do this crazy idea and fund its start-up then He can make it work! Child-like faith was all we needed and that's all we had! This idea went against everything business in me, so many times when we looked at retail business ideas I would put them away because of the time commitment for the owners. One time I remember telling my wife I **would never** do a retail business.

After my 180 degree turnaround, my wife turned too, she even put on hold her dream home so that we could put all the money we were saving for a new home into launching a coffee shop ministry. Her attitude revealed the supernatural hand of God and held the key to me moving the plan forward. Sharon was also about to bring baby Stephen into the world. I remember telling Sharon that if there were tickets given out for speeding in life, I should get one!

Things were confirmed by the Lord when He handed me two very profitable projects that generated supernaturally the funding needed to start the business. Certain people came along that were perfectly placed to help me perform these projects. I knew and believed that everything was being divinely orchestrated, so much so, that Sharon and I learned to get "comfortable" when we felt very "uncomfortable". Also I remembered how fast Jesus was moving on His White Horse and I was just trying to keep up the best I could, so was Sharon!

### **More Words of Confirmation!**

Once I was convinced of the decision to plant a church in Pilot Mountain, I knew I would have to go outside of our area to find ministries that would assist us with our café plant idea. During this time I sought out the

Vineyard church for guidance in our church planting concept. I felt that our vision was most closely aligned with theirs so I attended their minister's regional meeting. After speaking with several of the ministers there I got the sense that I was not connecting with them. Their model is more of a sales model. The church planter moves to an area hopefully with a team of families and tells the story of the church to 500 people to get the first 50 to attend, this process continues until 150 are gathered, then an associate pastor is brought in to carry the ministry forward. Mentoring and replacing one self in ministry connected with me, but the selling idea was not what I felt was best for a rural town like Pilot Mountain. People just naturally resist salesmen, especially one from the north.

In the spring of this same year, I had an opportunity to sell a very profitable project in Lumberton, NC. While I was in Lumberton one day asking the Lord to give me the project (I lost the deal), I decided to stay overnight at a Comfort Inn to pray about our café opening in Pilot Mountain. During this time of prayer, I experienced a very intense time with God where I started to prophesy over the entire east coast, my hands waving in the air and weeping over the spiritual state of our nation.

Later on in the spring of 2006, a young man, Jeff, moved to NC from CA to work in a deliverance ministry that we wanted to partner with at some point in the future. The day before we went to work on an installation project in West Virginia, Jeff went through a deliverance of many evil spirits that he was set free from by the power of the Holy Spirit. This session was very exhausting and the three of us who worked to set him free.

Jeff had a grandfather who was a freemason. When we attempted to release this devil from Jeff, the resistance was so intense I had to fall down and pray with such fervor like ever before. The pull of lust and power was so real, I only prayed in tongues; Jeff told me later that the Masonic spirit in him was telling him to get me to stop praying like that. I learned this about deliverance ministry: that setting a freemason free from the effects of this empire spirit is a very powerful encounter with darkness, you literally feel like you are dealing with Satan himself.

I had to leave the deliverance session before it was complete, but the two other deliverance workers continued for another four hours, finally Jeff was free. The next day we headed to West Virginia that night and we discussed the session together. I believed that he was free but he still was wrestling with doubts. I tried to confirm his freedom in Christ the best I could but we just ended up in a silly spat over whether there are levels in our sanctification in Christ.

The next morning I was so determined to pray over my own stuff that I was lying flat on the floor of the hotel room, I cried and cried asking the Lord to cleanse me thoroughly from any spirits of lust and pride. As I was asking for freedom from these sins I also begged the Lord to cleanse Pilot Mountain of her devils. I pleaded that His Spirit would be released to wipe away our unbelief and join His People together. Jeff was intently praying with me, toward the end of this prayer session, Jeff said that he distinctly heard the Lord say to him, *"I heard your request"*.

The Lord showed him a beautiful vision of Pilot Mountain which made it look like a water fountain. Jeff said he saw water flowing up out of the top of the knob and cascading down 360 degrees all around the perimeter of the mountain. Underneath the showers of falling water mist were doves flying all around underneath and beautiful prismatic colors with much more luster and beauty than a rainbow.



Though this young man (about 35 years old) was with me for just 2 months to assist me with my West Virginia project, he played a significant role in helping work through the planning stages of opening our ministry-based coffee shop. Right before we opened the Lord led him to New Orleans to be involved with the Hurricane Katrina relief effort and then onto other places in the world where devastation was prevalent.

After this very deep and life changing time with the Father, I promised to do something to attach myself personally to what I truly believed was going to be a Big Move of God in Pilot Mountain. Once I sensed that God was in this Pilot Mountain revival, I vowed to not cut my hair until it came to pass.

At the time of this me writing this testimony of God's dealing with me, I have had many intense moments with God but not the thing the Lord showed me in that hotel room. My hair has grown down onto my back and I look like an Old Testament prophet. Most people think I am a hippy because of my appearance, but I am the farthest thing from a hippy. I never was into drugs or that culture, I don't drive around in a VW van, tie-dye my shirts, write poems, sing folk songs, I was never a Deadhead nor did I go on long wilderness journeys to find myself, no, none of these traits I would be accused. All I have done is make a vow to not cut my hair, until the work of grace in Pilot Mountain happens.

## **Our Launch into the Wild Unknown**

My wife with a two month baby in tow, and me, breaking all the laws of husbandly decorum, on May 12<sup>th</sup> of 2006, we opened our café ministry serving coffee, smoothies, frappes, and pastries, and offering live contemporary worship music on Friday and Saturday nights.

Soon after we opened our café, we had several people share with us their visions and dreams related to a heavenly outpouring in Pilot Mountain. These dreams and visions were in-line with the visions and dreams God had given us several times. These dreams revealed streams of incredible amounts of water flowing from Pilot Mountain and in another there were rainbows over top and around Pilot Mountain. About two years later we literally had a double rainbow over Pilot Mtn right after a big storm came through the area. These words confirmed to Sharon and I that we were hearing and seeing the future God intended for the area. Being very impatient by nature I took these confirmations as a sign that revival was coming very soon!

The first couple of months at the café we had more customers than we expected. There was a buzz in the town and area about our coffee shop. In order to open quickly I jettisoned the name Livin Lattes for the café to use to become a guinea pig of a Christian coffee shop franchise, Moby's coffee company. By the end of June, Sharon and I felt that the franchise method of doing our ministry of ushering a revival to the area was not the best way to achieve that goal.

The very first day we opened the café, I told the owner of the franchise that I saw our vision, Livin Lattes, as a spiritually driven vision to eventually become a church planting model of the future. I saw the potential of a partnership of spiritual and business creating a beautiful network of café churches up and down the east coast of the USA. The business side won out with him, much to our chagrin, and this man went on to launch about 20 stores in the next 18 months. Eventually this Christian franchise model broke down, having gone too far too fast.

Our separation was clearly written on the wall when the Lord opened up our minds to do a street event we called “takin back the streets for Jesus”. The franchiser was excited about the business aspects of this endeavor but I believe misunderstood the spiritual component of the revival we were seeking in the area.

## **Takin Back the Streets for Jesus**

In the first two months of opening the café we met many young people from the area, who suggested that we move our music to a stronger worship sound. They told us of a local band that was starting to get some regional attention called, A Kiss for Jersey. They played a version of heavy metal music labeled, “hardcore” music. Heavy beats with singing and screaming along with strong athletic dancing, quite different then anything I had ever seen before (moshing), made the idea of having this sound in a Christian coffee shop too radical for the fella who we were partnered with through the Christian coffee shop franchise.

In our first round of staffing the shop, I chose to select young men to work with us at the café. The primary reason was connected to a dream I had within the first few weeks of opening the café; in this dream I saw the face of a young girl who made accusations of sexual nature, this dream brought great hesitation about hiring young ladies at the cafe. We hired local Christian young men and strongly encouraged them to use the café for Bible Studies and fellowship. My wife and I told these three young men who were from Mt Airy and Pilot Mountain that the main purpose for our space was to spread the message of the kingdom of God.

One of these young men, Devin, suggested that we have a more heavy style worship event on Main Street Pilot Mountain. I liked the idea so we chose a date and moved forward trying to figure out how to pull it off in an ultra conservative religious town. I knew in my heart that if we were to turn a community in our America around it would not be done inside the four walls of a church. After about two weeks of wrestling with the idea we decided to proceed with this work. We named it, “takin back the streets for Jesus”.

Fortunately, the city manager lived right above us on the third floor; he had heard us talking about this idea of a street concert. Our young and new city manager desired very much to gain some positive publicity for the Town of Pilot Mountain. Our city manager put the concert in the street on the agenda for the next town meeting. Devin and I went and shared with the city council and mayor the intent of the event, after we assured them that the message was a Christian message and that no alcohol would be served they agreed to support the event.

We set a date for July 22<sup>nd</sup>. The band “A Kiss for Jersey” was to headline the show along with three other Christian bands. Two of the bands were heavy rock or hardcore and the other two were more strong worship music. At this event we hoped to gather 1000 people. We ended up having about 500. With no experience in managing an event like this, we did the entire event by the seat of our pants. It cost my wife and I about \$2,500 which covered the cost of T-shirts, band fees, and advertising.

The planning for this event was nothing short of a miracle. In less than two months the details came into place. When they told me I needed a PA system to do the event I thought that this would be no big deal. God bailed me out of my ignorance by sending a very kind man to our coffee shop who was willing to offer sound for free. If it wasn't for people willing to help us, this event would have never happened. This very nice man, Darrell, a former professional musician, offered to help me after he learned of my heart for the town. After we prayed together, all of us began to sense the touch of the Holy Spirit in managing all the details for us.

As our planning progressed and things were coming into form, one day I was led by the Lord to gather all of our staff to pray. We were only a few days away from our first TBTS for Jesus outreach. As we gathered we all sat on the couches that were set near the front of our shop. I shared the truths contained in Exodus chapter 3. The account was of Moses and the burning bush; in this incredible encounter with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Moses is commissioned to go and gather the elders of Israel and tell them of God's plan to release the children of Israel from their oppressive 430 year bondage in the land of Egypt.

As we closed our time together I asked the Lord to "gather" with us. I asked Him to anoint us with oil and bless us with His Holy Presence. At the end of our prayer time, one of our staff, Darren, had a vision of himself standing on top of Pilot Mountain arms stretched out as though he was hanging on a cross and then was lifted above the top of Pilot Mountain. As he was being lifted up, he was spun around and oil was poured over his head. Darren said that he felt like literal oil was being poured over this head. This was a very dramatic encounter with God the Holy Spirit. Darren knew he had just encountered the Living God; he knew, deep down, that his life would never be the same.

As we all went our separate ways, one of our staff drove home and saw something in the sky he had to share with me. His name is Jonathan. What Jonathan saw made a dramatic impact on me. As he was going home and meditating on what we had just experienced in the presence of God in our prayer time, he looked toward Pilot Mountain, as he looked on this very clear day, he saw a cloud above and off to the right of the rocky knob portion of the mountain. He kept on driving and then looked back again at the mountain, this time he noticed that this same cloud had moved over to the top of the knob and was covering it. God was showing him through the cloud that He was going to tabernacle with His People very soon.

A couple of days before the event I took Darren & Devin to the top of Pilot Mountain to pray. This time proved to be very special. We sang hymns and performed worship with all our hearts. I told them that this moment paralleled the experience of Joshua and Caleb before the nation of Israel was to take the land of Canaan. I instructed them this was the land they were to conquer, all the beauty their eyes saw belongs to God, and that, we are called to bring the land back to His Son --- Jesus.

After these special moments with our staff, I had my own very real and intense times in the presence of God. The afternoon of July 21<sup>st</sup>, the day before the event, the Lord led me down to Tom's creek at the bottom end of our property. Once there, I sat on a bench overlooking the creek and prayed for guidance, power, and wisdom. I stayed there for just a little when I started to sense the Spirit calling me to go down into the creek.

As I walked into the water I sensed the Spirit encouraging me to continue down stream. As I walked I noticed the trees that had fallen into the creek from the storms that had passed through our area over the last year. When large amounts of rain hit our area, the creeks and rivers swell to 6-8 feet above their normal height. This activity had caused many trees to fall into the creek due to water erosion around their root system; the amount of rain that fell over the last year was enough to put about 6 large trees into the creek. The Lord revealed that these trees represented the religious systems and power structures of man. When the Lord's rain fell, these systems were being toppled by the power of the water representing God's spirit.

I continued this walk with tears starting to stream down my face, I noticed that I was walking through deeper parts of the creek. I didn't want to go that deep but the Spirit was influencing me to continue on deeper and deeper. I could not help but connect this experience with Ezekiel's prophecy where in chapter 47 he described the heavenly sight of Zion's influence on the city of Jerusalem and on to the entire earth by walking through a river that eventually submerged him completely in water. Ezekiel's and my experience was going to reveal that God will totally cover us one day with His fullness.

This very spiritual walk with God ended with me lying down in a spot in the creek where there was a small waterfall. Here the Lord led me to lay down with my head under water. As I did this I heard the rumblings of the water swirling around my head under the water. Later on a friend of mine helped me understand what was going on with me during this moment. The water was totally immersing my body and my head where our thoughts are located. Here in our thoughts are the problems and crazy stuff that happens to anyone who decides to go and pursue the Kingdom of God in a radical way. Turbulence is part of the walk of a surrendered man, a man who walks in the faith of the patriarchs of Hebrews 11. Without a diligent and determined walk we will never please God.

As I lifted my head out of the water the sun broke through the clouds. God's glory is in the sun and I was saturated in it, as I sat on the rock near where I laid down in the water, I wrote about the details of the experience knowing in my heart that I would never forget this message from Him.

The next morning I woke up with a heavy heart, I would say it was a spirit of oppression. It was like I was about to face the strongest force of darkness ever assembled. The weather forecast was for heavy rain in the afternoon and evening hours. As I prepared my heart for this epic day, I took a shower praying as I usually do, I prayed in the spirit to myself, then I sensed that things were intensifying in my heart. Before long I was face down on the shower floor crying out against this darkness I saw in my spirit. I declared that the streets of Pilot Mountain belonged to God and His Christ. I kept saying, "back, back!" The Lord Jesus Christ is coming through. In my heart I saw what looked to be large snakes with huge, very nasty dragon-like heads. There were layers and layers of these horrible creatures covering the streets. I knew I could not move them out of the way, I was scared to death. The LORD kept imparting faith and I kept praying for God's power to pulverize these dark venomous creatures.

After this very intense session I went to the café to get ready for the event! The sound crew was early, and they were ready to do whatever to make things sound good! The bands started to arrive. A couple of Mormon missionaries came up to share their faith with me. I asked them to join our time of worship; I even suggested that they take their ties off so they could really enjoy themselves. The final word I gave one of the missionaries was in response to my question, "why are you here?" This young, very serious man said that God told him to come here and spread his message. I looked him right in the eye and said with all the sincerity I could muster, "that was not His Voice you heard!" This may have agitated him very much, because the Mormon missionaries were handing out their literature throughout the entire time of the event.

No rain fell during setup but at about 5pm when we were gathering together to eat and pray with the bands it started to rain. As soon as I heard that it started to rain I prayed and prayed in the spirit to myself. The guys who were doing the sound for us were also praying. One of our young leaders started to worry about the sound equipment and instruments, so he drove off to get some tarps to cover the sound equipment. After about 15 minutes of prayer, I went outside and looked up at the sky to see what was going on! What I saw was amazing, I had never seen anything like it. In answer to our prayers, God had

taken his Finger and cut an opening in the clouds right over our heads. I yelled at the guys to come out and look at the sky with me to see this amazing phenomenon.

I shared with this group from Ps. 121 *"I will look unto the hills where does my help come from, the Maker of Heaven and earth"*. We believed that the Lord, our creator, would hold off the rain and give us a time to worship in the streets.

So the concert began around 5:30pm with a local band, "Not Really" from King, NC playing very beautiful contemporary rock worship music. As they were playing in the very thick humidity in the hottest part of the day, the sun came out. Our coffee shop was full of people. The town was buzzing about the event and the music. The second band, "At A Downfall", played a very metal / screamo sound. The kids were into this part of the show and we were now in the midst of some brewing controversy. The adults started to question the screaming and the heavy beats.

The questioning continued as "A Kiss for Jersey" got up to play their set. As they were taking the stage, my wife told me we were totally out of quarters and that I needed to go to Food Lion to get them more quarters. Because of the crowd and the congestion in the street, I decided to ride my bike to Food Lion which was a mile away. On the way I was able to look at the knob on Pilot Mountain, what I saw were these large white clouds covering the mountain. I sensed the Lord was with us in a special way.

This awesome physical reality motivated me to pray that we actually declare this truth to those who were worshipping the streets with us! I rode back with tears in my eyes telling the Lord it doesn't have to be me, but please, let someone preach the truth of Your Power to these needy people. When I arrived, "A Kiss For Jersey" was now about half way through their set, I walked up to the stage and started to dance with the kids who were having a great time. Then I started to feel this pressure to bow down and worship on the pavement in front of the band, I felt something very strong in the air around me.

As their set ended, I stepped up onto the stage to hug them for the experience I just had on the pavement, once on stage I glanced at the mountain behind me, at this moment I knew God was here, and He was present in their sound and the words they sang, even though most of the folks were unformed of the content of their lyrics, the Lord gave me the sense that He was pleased with their worship. This moment would change my life forever.

I had felt the tangible presence of God in their music, I didn't understand their words completely but I received the sense of what they were saying, in particular the song that they called, "Dressed for the occasion" which referred to the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ. After I hugged Matt, their guitarist, I turned toward the crowd and started to speak to them about the meaning of their words and music.

At this point all I knew was that I was not speaking, some intense emotion and energy was running through my body and my mouth was moving and people were listening to me as I stared at their faces. I just spoke about the song referring to the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Jesus, our need to prepare for this reality and that it didn't matter how awful your life had been up to that point, His Blood could cover and wash away all your sin!

I declared that just as sure as that mountain sits up there and that the rain is being held off our heads by His Hand, just as sure as that, He will return and we must repent. It doesn't matter what kind of sins you have committed, He will forgive them all. I jumped down from the trailer and noticed that people were staring at me. The sun rays had actually turned a goldish orange color, it was hard to understand but while

I was preaching God did something to the air and the color of the air. My wife told me later that even from inside the café you could tell the sunlight had changed color! The sense of the presence of God was so real.

The last band, Broken, played wonderful contemporary worship music, as they played their final songs, the top of Pilot Mountain was lit up with multicolored lightning flashes, it made me think of the Israelites meeting God at Mt Sinai. What many misunderstand about Mt Sinai is that God was so excited about gathering His People at that time that the thunder and lightning was a way of God showing His awesome enthusiasm to be in the presence of His People.

After the concert was completed and we were all packed up, at 11:15 pm, the rains fell like buckets of water all over Pilot Mountain. I ran out into the street saying, "This is my God, this is my God," over and over again. The miracle connected to all the spiritual encounters we received leading up to the event. I believed very strongly that we were now part of a long term spiritual renewal in Pilot Mountain and the surrounding areas.

This event was bigger than anything I had ever witnessed in my life. People were telling me that we should start a church. Days after the event we heard of kids and people making professions of faith and receiving water baptism in many of the churches outside the main street churches in Pilot Mountain. I know in my heart that these wonderful events were connected to what the Lord brought to pass through the TBTS for Jesus event on July 22<sup>nd</sup> 2006.

## **Bible Studies at the Cafe**

Standing at the bar, one serving drinks, a couple of local women asked me if I wasn't going to start a bible study at the café. Sensing it was of the Lord I suggested to them, "How about Monday night?", then they asked, "What are you going to teach on?" I said, "How about we study the book of Revelation?" They agreed to the time and the book of Revelation, on Aug 7<sup>th</sup> 2006, we had a first café sponsored Bible Study. This grew to about 17 people at one point but most of the time we ministered to about 5-8 people.

I hoped that by doing the study on Monday nights we would give those in the local community who were hungry for more Bible teaching an opportunity to study without having to miss their normal services. I was not trying to compete with the local churches, but they did not believe that my intentions were as pure as I believed they were to be. During these early days of gathering local folks for a Bible Study, something very disheartening happened. A local church that used the café to gather and minister to their local youth decided to start their own prayer time on Monday nights. Some of their people would come to our studies and be blessed but after this change in their scheduling, they would not attend our Bible Study. This strategic move caused a lot of the momentum we were building to subside. Eventually our Monday night studies became my prayer time with just a few people who the Lord brought to us from outside the area.

## **How about Church Services at the Café?**

Sometime in July a small house group asked us if we would open the café on Sunday mornings to have a service. The plan was to start having church services on Aug 6<sup>th</sup> of 2006 at 11 am on Sunday morning. The plan was to have their pastor, Aaron Butler preach and lead worship. Aaron had much experience preaching the gospel and was also a great worship leader. About a week before our services were to begin,

Aaron's father died of a sudden and unexpected heart attack. Immediately he had to leave the area to take care of his mother.

Since we had informed the community that we were going to have Sunday services, I decided to proceed with services without Aaron and his group. The local paper led with a story about having Sunday Services. During this very turbulent time we had a falling out with the franchise owner. I attribute this turbulence to the Lord's Hand guiding Sharon and I to the place and the way He wanted our ministry to operate. Also it was connected to the turbulence I experienced laying down in the creek on July 21<sup>st</sup>, the day before our 1<sup>st</sup> TBTS for Jesus outreach.

The Lord confirmed His Desire for me to break away from the franchise and start our own café ministry in a dream. In the dream the word, "Livin Lattes must live!" was loudly proclaimed over and over in my heart. This word troubled me, I knew it was God, and I knew our separation from the franchise was inevitable by the way things were progressing with the franchise owner. The very first week of August we officially separated from the franchise; this separation would cause us a lot of grief for the next several months as people stopped coming to our café due to the criticism the franchise owner unleashed on us right after we left his organization. We were either going to obey God or man... the obvious choice was – GOD!

We learned again that the call to follow Christ would cost us everything! The Lord had allowed the enemy to sow discord with our franchise partner. He was convinced that we were doing things wrong and that we were undermining him, this was not the case!

After we changed the name of the coffee shop to "Livin Lattes International", an article was written in the papers about the decision. We shared with the Pilot Mountain community that our sole purpose for opening the café was to connect the community through positive conversations.

At the exact time that all the controversy was going on we had our very first Sunday church service, due to the article in the local paper announcing our service we were pleasantly surprised to see the café full of new faces. Even though they were mostly motivated out of curiosity, I was still given the opportunity to preach once again over my head in challenges. I had not done anything or organized any kind of movement like this before. I knew how to teach the Bible, but preaching was a different thing. Other than a couple of times back in the churches we had left in NJ, then a week's worth of study and preparation, now just a verse and the Holy Spirit. As I opened my mouth, words just came out that were sounding very true and real. Once again I remembered the time with God in the creek and the expression of His Power on top of the flat bed trailer in downtown Pilot Mountain.

The Lord gave me this text, Mt 24:37, *"As it was in the days of Noah so it shall be when the Son of Man returns to the earth..."* As I preached this message from heaven, I felt it to be someone else doing the preaching. The theme of this message was in accord with the words of John the Baptist, in which cried in the wilderness. *"Prepare you the way of the Lord".*

To this day I believe that my preaching anointing is connected to being faithful to do something that was completely over my head. I also believe that other men, especially those in the rising generation, are being called by the Lord to preach the Gospel publicly. God is raising up a different kind of preacher for this season in our America. What I have sensed is the preaching and ministry of the prophets and those first century apostles is returning to the body of Christ, due to the judgments that are falling on our nation. The

prophets Jeremiah, Haggia, Zachariah, Ezekiel, Amos, Joel, Isaiah, and others prophesied in similar conditions.

Places like the public square, city hall, city parks, and the public schools are the kind of preaching locations that the Lord is going to lead His servants to declare His Word. No more hiding away in our little social comfort zones we call “our” church. No, more and more, He will lead us to do something we have not been trained to do. But He will train us how to make fishers of men just like He did with the original twelve apostles and those that they mentored to take their place.

All that matters at the point of His Glorious return is that, ***“The Lord be magnified”***. His word promises that if we lift Him up He will draw all men to Himself. Soon after this dream I had another dream shortly after the dream I just described. In the dream I was planting a cross right next to the café with the words, “cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree” going through my head over and over again. After planting the cross next to the café I wrote this verse on the cross. I added the verse in John I mentioned earlier which says, ***“If we lift Him up, He will draw all men to Himself.”***

In yet another vision, the Lord showed me stretched out on the center of Pilot Mountain where Main Street and Depot Street intersect, the true center of Pilot Mountain. It was like I was hanging on a cross and really dying. The Lord has and continues to show me that our ministry requires me to die “daily” for it to become what He desires it to be. I have died in ways I never thought I would here in Pilot Mountain.

The attendance at our church services started out in the first year to range from 20-40 people which was quite good. But in our 2<sup>nd</sup> year the attendance dropped to about 10-20 people. People came and went, some longer than others, they consistently would say to me, “I really felt the presence of God here today.” They would say also that they needed to hear that style of preaching but it wasn’t enough to keep them coming back. We were too outside the box for them and I believe they didn’t want to suffer alone with us until we became a more popular church to the powers of the town, which would never happen!

## **Our Next Step**

During the course of our time downtown in Pilot Mountain we felt that our vision was confirmed for revival and renewal in days to come, but the local politics of the town fought against us and the local churches showed little support. At the end of 2006 I went to Israel for the 1<sup>st</sup> time in my life to deal with some nagging questions that lingered heavily in my spirit for several years. My wife and I almost quit the ministry during this very down time in our café ministry. We released the café to the Lord and I released the church we were seeking to plant in Pilot Mountain. In every way we felt like we were on our own.

I made a very important decision after I got back from Israel. I decided to continue with a marketplace approach with our ministry and make our café more attractive to the town by adding food to the menu. If we did not add a great range of gourmet sandwiches and wraps we would have never been able to move out of the dark hole we fell in after we left the franchise. I also decided to walk away from my profitable contracting business and devote all my time to building up our café ministry and our restaurant. Our shows and ministry became much more popular as we added more effort. We built an identity and a name that was about: Great Coffee, Gourmet Sandwiches, Great Shows, and Incredible Worship!

By the grace of God I made our own website and began to establish our music venue component of ministry. I opened up a Myspace account to connect with the kids and bands to establish our venue.



Originally we just offered worship music, but over time we offered more of the heavy metal, power pop, indie pop, and acoustic folk styles of music to attract young and old to the café. We even did an old time bluegrass and Elvis show to show the people in town were not just focused on the kids we saw running around the streets at night.

The music side of the café started to escalate in July of 2007 when we opened up the alley next to the café and setup a stage at the back, we called the location, "God's Alley". The local bands that were excited to play in "God's Alley" mostly played the heavier style rock and roll. These outdoor shows brought a lot of attention and young people started to pour into our café from all over the region. During this time I was starting to get in more and more trouble with the police for stuff that just was not that big a deal! There seemed to be an undercurrent of opposition in town that I could not identify.

As we planned more shows in God's Alley, the process to get approval from the town got harder and harder to schedule. At these shows I would preach short sermons and pray with the kids and invite them to unify and invade the high school and the society around them with Christ's Message of Love.

In order to do outside shows we had to write up a 30-day permit and get the approval of a hand picked committee, called Mt. Pilot Now, which was made up of mostly older folks who did not like our music. Since the alley was part of the property we paid rent for we planned to do many more outside shows than we actually were able to do (once a month); but it was not long before the town fathers and mothers subtly shut these monthly events down by speaking against them around town. If I had done bluegrass or gospel music only, we would have been fine, but I was determined to attract the lost and wandering kids with the music that connected to their hearts! I felt that the popularity of our heavier style music and the crowds they attracted downtown were starting to scare the powers of the town that a real positive change was coming to town. In order to keep the peace we moved our shows inside and added sound barriers to keep the sound from overwhelming the street.

When we went inside, particularly at the end of time on Main Street, we felt a freedom to let the Holy Spirit do whatever He desired in our café. There were several times in the downtown location that kids were lost in a deep sense of the presence of God.

## **Taking Back the Streets for Jesus II**

The first year we presented "Takin back the streets for Jesus" to Pilot Mountain we drummed up a lot of support from local churches and youth leaders, the second year we did the entire event on our own. Feeling all alone this year, I was not in the mood to do the event in 2007. My heart attitude changed after a dream, where the Lord showed me the same street where we had the 1<sup>st</sup> event in 2006 with a banner over the stage that read, "be reconciled to Christ" I took this as a sign that no matter what, we had to do the event. This decision cost us heavily. With little or no help and a host of last minute planning, made this .event ripe for failure, but God somehow got us through

For the sake of brevity I will mention some things about our third annual, "Takin Back The Streets for Jesus". We have now had three events. The last event happened on Aug 21-23 in 2008. We had about 90 bands from all over the USA come to play at the foot of Pilot Mountain at Jomeokee Campground in Pinnacle, NC. We experienced tremendous blessings from the Lord as kids were touched before the mountain of God and in the presence of His angels. Many tears and holy promises were offered to the

Lord, which confirmed the purpose of this event as a place to worship, pray, and preach the Word without shame! One day this event will literally flip cities in America

I believe God's Hand is on this ministry for a long time. Primarily we hope it will bring together bands who also consider their music and ministry the method to reach lost souls and raise up new leaders in His Kingdom. I believe that those who join with us to perform this kind of public ministry will be the next generation evangelists, prophets, and apostles

At some point I would love to have this event become portable by going city to city during the summer. The TBTS for Jesus would go specifically where there are people on the ground praying for and planning to disciple those who are being saved. Ideally, there would one day be a Living Lattes ministry in the town or city as well. Churches would be planted in these cities and towns that are raised up and sent by LLI Fellowship (our nonprofit corporation sole

The musicians that feel the most drawn to this event are those who want to connect with other young men and women who have the same heart to reach our America in these times of judgment. The reason we are focused primarily on public and marketplace ministry is that the hour is late. The Lord launched His Church with public ministry and I believe He will end the Church Age with a fury of this passionate way of presenting Christ! We have been accused of being a cult; I have been accused of being a cult leader. Cults do not operate in the public like we do. Our message is in the open air for all to hear and challenge

The music will change but it will always be spiritual and it will connect to the hearts of those being saved. Some will continue to play the heavier style of worship, but other styles will emerge as the Lord releases more sound from heaven. They will play in bars and various other kinds of secular venues, but unless we raise them up and help them as prophets and apostles of our time, they will burn out and quit

## **Retrospect**

In a small town, Jealousy plays a big role in creating negative words about people and it instills attitudes that attack people that bring new direction. They assume that people who have big plans and an ability to execute them are not good for a small town. I totally disagree with this assessment. I believe that small towns need big ideas to grow, the next generation youth need new ideas to bring prosperity to the town they will run someday.

What happened in our situation was simple, kids saw a Jesus that was relevant to their problems. They saw a Jesus that was not prudish or legalistic. They saw people who loved Jesus having a good time in His presence. They also saw Jesus heal people right in front of their eyes. They saw Jesus move upon our town and touch many kids with His Love outside their places of worship. Though jealousy played a role in resisting our work, we have inspired the churches around the area to step up their ministry for their youth to keep them.

Our large turnouts for many of our shows, especially at the end of our time on Main Street, we saw that the traditional churches are having a hard time digesting this method of gathering youth. The churches and the parents of some of the local church families feared that I would take away their youth. By the end of our two years in downtown Pilot Mountain, we were at a breaking point for our business and family. Last month we were in operation at the downtown location and we ran a \$4,000 profit, proving to ourselves that we could do ministry and turn a profit too!

## Our Unexpected Surprise

While we thought we were going to make a solid business in the downtown location, we received an unexpected letter in the mail from our landlord. She decided not to renew our lease. To add to our surprise we had just 30 days to get our equipment and furniture out of the café. We were completely surprised and caught off guard by this news; we were out of business even though our business was growing. In my heart I felt that this was a strong handed move to put us out of business in Pilot Mountain. To this day I feel like God wanted us out because He wanted to move to a place with greater potential for long term success. I asked all of our youth to pray and believe in God for a miracle.

I went on a faith hunt to find another site. I believed that we would not miss one Sunday worship time at a Livin Lattes site. I believed with all my heart that God was at the center of this difficult time and He was going to carry us through.

In June of 2008, we were led to use a farm equipment building to move our café and our venue, this site was located right by the interstate. We lasted at this location for about four months, during this time we probably had anywhere from 250 – 300 bands play at our venue, quite remarkable for a family that had no music venue experience in their life. Every aspect of our gospel work in Pilot Mountain has been new to us; this is what makes following Christ so hard and so exciting. We must never fear the word, “new” if we are going to follow Christ when He leads us to do His Work in His Kingdom, especially in these days.

During this time I started to wake up to what was really going on with us in Pilot Mountain and what was going on with Livin Lattes in Pilot Mountain. We were creating some solid momentum with youth outreach. We also experienced strong support from young aspiring Christian heavy metal and rock and roll artists. Our relationships with these emerging leaders were edifying to them and us.

We just showed these traveling musicians Christ’s love. Many of them were not Christian bands but that didn’t matter to us! As we showed them Christian love and hospitality they felt the love of Christ. Many of them were allowed to use our rented apartment above the café to take much needed showers and get rest in a comfortable setting. So too at the next location, we added living rooms with couches and mattresses for these needy folks.

We saw how showing the love of Christ to the secular bands yielded good conversations and respect, in some cases; they were brought closer to Christ. Rarely did I feel like we were overstepping our bounds with our public statement of being a Christian venue. We thought it Christ-like to let many different kinds of bands play our venue to show them that we were not religious zealots and rigid in our presentation of our worship and or entertainment. We coined this slogan at Livin Lattes, “espresso yourself” and that is the spirit we fostered, within the bounds of decency and love to our neighbor.

On Oct 6<sup>th</sup> 2008 we closed our doors at the temporary location and on Oct 20<sup>th</sup> we had our last show and worship service. This 7 band show was epic in every way. God was there in a powerful way. The band, “For Today” headlined this Monday night show and they confessed that they were surprised at how many kids came out and also how powerful the atmosphere was. It was a great end to our time at 105 Lola Lane.

Since our closing in October I have been focusing on my family and on what God is doing. I realize that many of the towns’ people were able to make us out to be villains, but Sharon and I felt that we had

support from the silent majority. I took advantage of this down time to write a vision for the ministry of Livin Lattes International and the café. We also wrote a doctrinal statement to share with other like-minded ministries.

During this time I have had numerous emails and many phone conversations to solicit help and support but have yet to make a positive connection within the Body of Christ with those who have a similar vision to build the next generation church.

We have witnessed many blessings and increase in the kingdom of God in almost 4 years of laboring here in Pilot Mountain, but have suffered many losses! During our time here we looked to other ministries to share our burden for the town of Pilot Mountain, a place I have dubbed a, "strategic high place for the enemy", but we have not found a local ministry that actually believes God is going to send a great revival to restore our area!

I have not been able to write **all the details of our time** or even the many little conversations which made impressions on people while we served them coffee, soup, or sandwich. But I hope that this distillation of our experience will give you a feel of this kind of ministry and what it might require of you should you feel God's hand on your life to "Take back the streets for Jesus" in your town.

## **Sojourning and another baby**

We have now been out of the public eye for almost 5 years at the time of this recounting of the early days of Livin Lattes International (August 3<sup>rd</sup> 2014). I must quickly review the last 6 years of wandering our family has endured. We left Pilot Mountain in February of 2011. As of February 2014 we have found our way back to Pilot Mountain. We are learning every day that we are back in Pilot Mountain God has a plan for this area... still!

Since we closed down our public location the Lord has taken our large clan through some very challenging times. I have been able to maintain the vision God gave me for Pilot Mountain through our ministry website [www.impactourcity.com](http://www.impactourcity.com). Through this medium I have been able to keep folks informed as to our whereabouts. In an effort to compress these years down to a few paragraphs. For I believe I have spent too much time already on me.

Through our movements around the US, seeking to find the fulfillment of our prayers for revival, God chose to move us around to teach us lesson after lesson that He is God and that He will not leave us or forsake us. We know that revival is coming to our land in divinely selected spots known only to God

We continued to strive to know the plan, the plan includes more faith struggles and emotional hardship marking every step of our way.

My writing and video blogging ministry provided some solace for me in a seemingly vain effort to stay connected to any one who cared about our whereabouts. Interestingly the writing and video blogging has connected me with a few people around the country who found my work to be helpful. These connections, mostly with folks struggling like us, brought us provision in our most needy times. To them it may have been a little sacrifice, maybe for some their gift was like that of the widow and her mite. But I am testifying that those gifts came into our mailbox or bank account on days when we needed it the most. Money to keep the electricity running, money to keep the water turned on, and money to maintain our car insurance.

Through these wandering years God has been stripping me more and more of pride and self-reliance. One additional critical learning component to this time were the challenges associated with the circular route that we took after we decided to walk away from 212 Foothill Farm Lane in Pilot Mountain, NC in February 2011. There seems to be no logic to God's way, little or no logic is not what He requires, we are required simply to walk by faith.

After 2 years of making no progress in partnering with a financier to fund our public ministry, during these years 2009 – 2011 I began to look for work outside the area. I became very frustrated by the slow economy in NC, so I started to look nationwide at opportunities to go back into the fire station ventilation business, only two possibilities surfaced, one in Canada and the other in Southern CA.

After a failed attempt to move to Canada in 2010, our family gathered all we could stuff into a yellow 26ft Penske and headed out for SoCal in February of 2011. We decided to take a huge risk and try a job with a 3 month promise of pay with Christian Brothers Mechanical in Riverside, CA. And yes, one more thing, in our waiting process and add more drama to the trip, Sharon was 7 months pregnant with #8.

Side note, this pregnancy was the third one after two miscarriages. Added to her and our struggle was the reality that Sharon wanted to move back to NJ to be with her mom who was dying of cancer. Her long and ineffective treatment was not working and Sharon knew that she was close to passing away. Sharon's desire was to be by her mom, but the Lord had other plans for her and for us.

Sharon, now 7 months pregnant, was faced with the uncertainty of a 3000 mile relocation to the other side of the country while agonizing over the health of her mom who lay close to death back in NJ. But we were so desperate for a chance to make real money and start over that we decided to take the risk. So we moved to Southern CA to work at a job with no security. We were not able to land a place to rent so we were forced to stay at a Holiday Inn for 7 whole weeks all 8 of us and one point all 9 of us stayed together in one hotel room, interestingly most of our 7 week stay was in room # 212 which was the number of our home we had just left back in Pilot Mountain NC.

We would survive that crazy 7 weeks, through the assistance of Sharon's mom and father, we were able to move into a beautiful 5 bedroom home right before the baby was born. On May 12<sup>th</sup> 2011, Zoe Hannah Grace Keener came into the world after 17 hours of labor. After Zoe's arrival, Sharon looked so tired, our sense was this was going to be the baby of our family.

About one month after we brought Zoe home to the beautiful home we were renting, a community nestled in Horseneck Canyon on the outskirts of Corona CA, we had to face the reality of her mom's health. Sharon's dad called and informed us that Sharon needed to fly home back to NJ with the baby. Three days after Sharon and Zoe were with her mom, she passed away.

Sharon and I were flown back to NJ for the funeral service, during this time we started to feel a tug in our hearts to go back and support the family. The church struggles and conflicts we had left back in 2005 didn't seem all that important anymore. The seed was planted in our hearts to consider the idea of moving back to NJ.

It didn't take long for circumstances to change with my work situation. Before I knew it, my job situation totally deteriorated. Looking for a job in CA was a non-starter, so Sharon and I looked at each other and

decided to tell our family that we wanted to come back to NJ. They were very happy. Things started to fall into place. So off we went with the yellow 26ft Penske, packed to the gills, praying for God's Hand to guide over the Rocky Mountains. We saw amazing scenes and we witnessed God's mercy in supplying just enough money for the ten of us to make the trip in 5 days, with a little help from friends and family.

The trip out to CA and the trip from CA to NJ gave us that unique chance to see the country from two different east/west interstate highways. We realized that our country has so many areas that are still untapped. The natural resources of this land are so plentiful. We have been so blessed to have access to so much of His Glory in designing such a wonderful land mass.

When we arrived back in NJ we were faced with many decisions about the kids and their schooling. Especially our oldest child, Jenna. She had graduated early from East Surry High School in Pilot Mountain, her desire while we were looking around at colleges was her desire to pursue film as a major. We had no money so we just gave the whole thought process to God. Jenna had been such a good high school student that the thought of her not going to college was unbearable.

Jenna took responsibility to search around the universities in NJ and NY to see what was possible. She found a film program at Montclair State University that seemed to be perfect for her. We set up a time to go and visit the school and to see if there was a way for her to be accepted. She had to produce a short film in order to get accepted in the film program. She threw something together in a couple of days using her I-pad and with her good high school transcripts she was accepted into the film program.

Our second oldest daughter had just survived a terrible 10<sup>th</sup> grade year, part of her scholastic studies were taken in NC and the other half in CA. The semester system in NC was not the same as in CA, one uses a split semester system while the other employs a full year semester system. Becca had to self-study over half of the text book material in all 4 of her classes, yet she finished the year getting straight A's in honor level courses – this would prove to be a powerful testimony in her college application process that would soon transpire the following year.

We decided to honor Sharon's mom by allowing her to enroll in the private Christian school that was connected to the church we had left back in 2002. This wasn't easy for me to do, but out of love for my daughter (who loved the classes that only this private school could provide) and for my father in law, I let her attend this school for her 11<sup>th</sup> grade year. This decision was also blessed in the following year when we decided to take her out of that school and put her in the public high school that Sharon had graduated from 25 years earlier where her guidance counselor and teachers would actively work to help her get into Princeton University, her heart's desire.

The Lord showed us during our time in NJ that He was there with us, even though we were not openly and publicly working for His Kingdom. I spent the two and half years in NJ learning how to sell solar systems, kitchen remodels, fencing, decks, and decorative concrete work. These experiences were moving my sales and business career in a whole new direction. All of these opportunities allowed me the opportunity to sit at the kitchen table of many unique people from all over the world (the greater NYC metropolitan area has almost every culture in the world represented by its citizens).

The most difficult part of this season was having to deal with the ups and downs of that economy. We were deeply impacted by the SuperStorm Sandy that hit in the northeast on October 25<sup>th</sup> 2012. My solar business was affected by this devastating event.

My boys were growing up and loving the things that NJ offered them. They were quickly recognized as talented baseball players. Makayla, our 3<sup>rd</sup> oldest daughter, prospered in school and as a cheerleader. But while our kids were doing well, Sharon and I were languishing spiritually and emotionally. Something seemed to be missing from our life. By the end of 2013 we were seriously praying about another move.

But where?

Late in the summer of 2013 I began to believe that we were supposed to be back in NC. I was afraid to share that news with Sharon and the kids. As I contemplated the status of my family and my own heart I realized that our time in NJ had reached its end. Our extended family thought we would move back and start attending our old church and life would just pick up where it had ended back in 2002.

We tried to find a good church in the area. When we would go to different churches in the area we were disappointed by the lack of emphasis on public outreach. The churches were struggling with finding that intimacy that the Holy Spirit gives a church when it is walking in obedience. Each church that we would attend I would find myself speaking with the leaders and telling them about the desire of God's heart for His Bride to come into deeper relationship with Him and each other.

I would like to note that one of our neighbors was the pastor of the largest church in the area. A very nice man who I really wanted to get to know. We had lunch one day and at the end of our time together I asked him to tell me where the "seat" for the prophet in his leadership council was. In a back-handed way I was saying, "I'm a prophet and I don't see how I can help your church because you don't recognize the role of a prophet in your church."

In an effort to summarize our two and half years in NJ I would say we honored our parents, God opened up doors for two of our girls to find colleges, and our boys developed some skills as baseball players. Other than my kids finding a few friends and realizing some of their talents and seizing opportunity, Sharon and I felt lost, we were not doing what heaven had summoned us to do almost ten years earlier. I would honestly assess my condition during this time as one of spiritual stupor.

Once we got deep into 2013 I started to feel like I was totally out of sync with God and His Spirit. One night in early January I had a dream where our Silver Excursion was hooked up to a U-haul trailer backed into our driveway. The scene was one of urgency. We had the sense that something terrible was coming and we needed to gather only the essentials like clothes and some basic food and get out of NJ. Once I told Sharon the dream she was as ready as could be to go. A few days passed and I realized that I needed to slow down a bit but to keep in sharp focus on the plan to move back to Pilot Mountain.

We told our family and friends in January of 2014 that we were going to move back to Pilot Mountain. They were very upset, especially Sharon's dad. In an effort to win his approval, I invited him over for a visit to discuss the plans we had for our family. This conversation led to a very interesting conversation that had an impact on my heart and made me come to appreciate what the Lord had taught me in our journeys before His watchful Eye.

I shared with a man that I have come to love very much that God had called me to preach the Gospel back in 2005 and I did that work through our café ministry. He said that was a foolish ministry, I told him that all I did was preach the Cross, and that I believed that the Cross of Jesus Christ does more than just save us

from our sins and insure our seat in heaven someday, but also brings His Power into our life.... My father in law turned and walked out on me when I tried to explain what I believe the Cross secures for us.

Sharon and I had to deal with some of the other family members who were not happy about our move back to NC. We did our best not to offer in kind with words in human wisdom but with quietness and trust that if the Lord wanted this geographical change for our family, He would make it happen.

The challenges were profound, I had to find money to move, a job, and home. My oldest daughter, Jenna, decided to allow me to use her car to go to a job interview, the only condition was that she wanted to come along with me, I reluctantly said "yes".

Together we scraped together enough money for gas and a little food and off we went. We prayed for the Lord to open up doors that no man could shut and close doors that no man could open. The weekend in NC was productive: I got a job offer before we left for NJ and a perfectly sized home for our large clan.

After Jenna and I got back from NC, I gathered the family and gave them the full report. I was offered a job selling unique hurricane resistant octagonal homes for beachfront and mountainous areas, homes mostly purchased by the affluent in getaway retirement and vacation spots. Some parts of the difficulty of moving had been solved but the problem still haunting us was the simple fact we had no money to move and no money to secure the 5 bedroom home that I had made a handshake deal on while I was in Pilot Mountain.

So we went to pray. One night my wife had a dream, in the dream she saw an envelope up in an attic under some floor boards, the envelope had \$12,000 cash inside, also, as she looked around the attic, she saw a water pipe off in the corner with water coming out. The pipe was running water but the water was not real water, this made me believe that the water pipe represents a heavenly source for this money. The verse in Ps 46 says, "There is a river whose streams make glad the city of Our God". I took Sharon's dream as a tip that God was going to supply a heavenly blessing.

A few days later we had a water pipe break over our garage, we thought this was an indication that the attic might contain the envelope with the \$12,000 we needed to get resettled back in Pilot Mountain. We went up into the attic searching for the envelope but found no envelope.

One of our old friends from NC asked if they sent us \$150 would that help us get down to NC, at first I thought that wasn't too much money because I was thinking about the thousands we need to all go down together as a family, but after a day of meditating on things, my daughter Jenna and I realized that we could go on ahead and start work on the day I promised my new boss I would start, February 10th. So we were so thankful that a humble young family was sensitive to the Holy Spirit and we were able to figure out a practical way to begin our process of moving the family.

The plan went like this: while I was starting work, Jenna would start to look for a job at a Starbucks in Winston Salem that would allow her to transfer from her Starbucks in NJ. So off we went.

In a mere eight and half short hours we were in Pilot Mountain. While I was driving I got the sense we were to go directly to our old home at 212 Foothill Farm Lane. This was not my plan but the Lord's. Prior to our planning the relocation back to Pilot Mountain, we were hoping against hope that the Lord would restore our land back to us this year. We had prayed so hard back in 2009 and 2010 that the Lord would bring



money to us supernaturally to pay our debts and save our land. We had a little faith to believe that someday things would be made whole for us.

Just prior to our visit we realized that a family had purchased our old land for \$130,000. About \$150,000 less than we had paid back in 2005. In the natural realm I was a little jealous about another family living on our land of promise, but the Lord was leading us to go and say “hi” and check out the situation at the old homestead. The visit went better than expected. The family that purchased our property professed to be Christians, they had fixed up the house but kept a very special piece of art in the kitchen. The verse we had Jenna write on the upper wall of the kitchen which contained those life verses from our family, “Trust in the Lord and do good, feed on His faithfulness, and He will give you the desires of His heart.”

Jenna and I shared with the family that God has blessed our family with His presence on this land. That we had worshiped on the land in various locations. The house was a little church for a while, and the creek was a place where we had baptized several converts. The keeper of the home said that she felt like the house was a real home.

With those particulars out of the way I began working at my new job on February 10<sup>th</sup> 2014. It was my heart’s desire that Sharon and the kids would find the money so we could bring the family down right away. I did my best to be content with the situation, used my time to update our ministry website by adding the order or path of restoration, full of hope that this year and at this time God was going to turn things around for us and our spiritual cohorts.

Things got more difficult for Sharon back in very cold NJ, she had no money and no help to shovel the incredible amounts of snow that was falling on NJ. Over the next two weeks NJ experienced two severe snow storms, one of which hit NC first, in the aftermath of these storms, the pipes burst in the house we were planning to rent. So we sensed our path was being blocked, having been through these kinds of struggles over the years of wandering, we realized we had to take a step back and wait on God.

God was holding things up for us for reasons that I could not understand. I did not want to fight God on this move so I chose to leave things as best as I could in His hands. Sharon and the kids were back in NJ praying hard every day too, they were looking for that elusive envelope and the money, and I was trying so hard to solve the dilemma of no money for the move, all I could say is that I was wanting them to be with me in NC. Sharon and I finally were able to finish our tax return, little did we know that this was the means that would bring our family together in NC.

So I picked up another yellow 26ft Penske in NC and drove it all the way to NJ to load it with as much stuff as we could fit. During the two weeks that I was working in NC the Lord was working on my father in law, I didn’t seem like it but He was doing something on the inside of his heart. I kept on praying and I kept on packing. Before I had left to start the job I had a Word from God which encouraged me, the Word was “great strength”. What a strong confirmation of what the Lord was saying to me and to the family. As we finished packing up the truck my father in law came by to help us finish packing and to say good-bye, with the truck almost fully packed, my father in law gave me a big hug and whispered in my ear, “I love you and I bless you”. This was exactly what Sharon and I needed to hear before we headed back to NC.

The trip was short compared to the crazy cross country excursions we had experienced in 2011, we were able to make it back home to Pilot Mountain in spite of the weird wintery weather that was hitting the east coast. Things were falling in place for my kids getting acclimated back into school, they were getting

reconnected with their old friends. Sharon was reconnecting with some of her old friends, everything was coming back together.

A very weird thing happened to my job situation. The man who owned the company decided that I was not going to be happy doing the work and that I didn't have enough knowledge about construction to be as successful as he would like. I sensed that he wasn't totally behind me early on, but I tried to work harder and win his support, but I could not prevail, on a Monday toward the end of March I was summoned to his austere office, it didn't take a genius to figure out what was going to happen next. The boss looked at me and said that I was a good guy with a great work ethic but he didn't have the patience or the time for me to get up to speed.

He promised me that he would pay me a month's wages and call it "moving expenses". While this was a nice gesture I surmised that the primary motivator was his desire not to pay unemployment. I had to come up with another plan. Again.

During my job search I made a connection with a semi-retired insurance guy who strongly encouraged me to give the health insurance industry a shot. He happened to be a christian man so I paid him extra attention. He said that his company had come up with a great way to avoid having to go into the new ObamaCare system. This was interesting to me on the level of wanting to educate and help people. Just like the solar business, this new health insurance paradigm would create new opportunities.

I gave insurance sales about one full month of serious effort with no success. As Sharon and I considered our new home we noticed that when we put all the furniture in place we sensed that our living room would be a multi-purpose area also useful for a work space that would open us up to work at home business. With insurance not quite working the way he had hoped and with about \$1,000 invested in licensing and other related costs to gain my insurance license for NC, SC, and TX, I decided that work at home was a good idea but we needed the right business.

Asking so many questions about the reasons behind my financial setbacks over the years as a sojourning prophet, I began to question if I was really hearing God correctly these past 10 plus years. I do believe that God can make sense of business and ministry work. So I kept looking around for people who I could work with as believers to make a positive business that helps create jobs for God's people. This effort thus far has not led to a positive result. Over the years I have found that you can't change who you are at the core of your being, the person you were intended to be from your formation in your mother's womb is who you really are.

Today, we wait for God. My family is growing and prospering, I am struggling to obey His Voice and His handiwork on the inside of me. I encourage all sojourners to learn with me the art of living each day. To wake up in the morning and simply to ask God to show you what to do each and every day. May the Lord bless this testimony to the edification of any who truly call upon His Name.

The Lord's richest blessings,

Jonathan Keener - Overseer

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### Observations:

1. The Lord has revealed to me that writing this account has built up my faith to continue on with His Vision to turn Pilot Mountain back to Him, and to help many in times of trouble.
2. Satan has worked the hardest on my personal resolve to continue on with this work.
3. In our struggle to follow the Lord we learn of the value of the words found in Heb. 5:8 "though He was Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered." Even though our Lord was perfect He was still subject to the weakness of his perfect flesh. Jesus dealt with the same temptations as we do, but without sin.
4. Once we submit to God's call on our life we can't mess up the details, we are left to trust in His personal word and His working into the deepest part of our hearts.
5. The Father remembers that we are dust. If we get off track or we move to too slow or fast the Lord will send us revelation in the form of dreams, visions, unexpected phone calls, strange conversations, financial setbacks, and the prayers of the saints, all this works together to keep us in the way we should go... this is His Work, not ours! He truly works all things together for good.
6. Since we have shut down Livin Lattes, the Lord has been teaching our family truths about His transcendence and how He wants us to move in these times,; things that I would have never learned had we not stepped away from our public ministry when He instructed us on Oct.6<sup>th</sup> 2008 to shut down His ministry to take care of our kids. His kids matter to Him and they need parents that are full-time in their care.
7. Our family life has been radically blessed by our current trial of waiting on Him for His deliverance. Right before our move to NC the Lord gave us this word from Ex. 14:14, "*Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord.*"
8. Now that we have made every attempt to move away from Pilot Mountain back in 2010, then leaving in 2011, and now back in 2014, this place has something in store for us and for His People. I

believe that this is a safe place, a city of refuge, that will shelter His People in the days that we believe will come that will bring His People together.

9. The lessons learned so far are simple, just live out each day. Try to hear and believe in every situation. Know God is there even when you don't feel so close to him. Without faith it is impossible to please God.
10. True Revival is defined by God, and not by flawed men and a lost culture.