



NON-PROFIT



TAX-EXEMPT

“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” MARK 16:15

February 2021

FROM US TO YOU

We are living in difficult times, especially for Christians, because the devil has been very busy lately (Revelation 12:12). It's easy to serve God when everything works out well. However, it's a different story when the walls feel like they're closing in on you and you're squeezed from every side. That's how many good people must feel these days. With all the public prayers and speeches that went on in Washington DC the day before the attack on the Capitol, one would assume that the mob that launched it thought they were doing the right thing and that their motives were well intentioned. But they were wrong! If it were God's will, it would have worked out. Clearly, it wasn't. So, there's a difference between doing something on faith and acting on presumption. Acting on a presumption is a dangerous thing. For you are choosing a desired outcome and praying that God will agree with you. It's not the same thing as praying for the will of God. There are times when things don't always work out the way you want them to. Yet, for those who love Him, the Lord always has a plan.

The plan may make no sense to you, looking forward. However, God knows what He is doing. That's why we have to trust Him. When God told Moses to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt by way of the Red Sea, and Pharaoh's army came chasing after them, the people were fearful (Exodus 14:11-12). They could not have known that it was part of God's plan to drown all of Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea (see Exodus 13:18). When "...Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it" (Daniel 1:1 NIV) it seemed like God's people had been defeated. Yet the Lord had a plan in the whole thing. It was to punish His children for their sins (Deuteronomy 32:15-27) and to bring glory to Himself through Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. If the siege by Babylon had not happened, the Israelites would have continued to backslide, perhaps beyond hope of redemption, and the Lord would not have been able to have shown His power through the burning furnace (Daniel 3:6-26) and the lion's den (see Daniel 6:7-27). Nebuchadnezzar would not have come to the Lord (Daniel 4:34-35) and Daniel wouldn't have risen from an imprisoned eunuch (2 Kings 20:18, Daniel 1:3-18 KJV) to third ruler in the kingdom (Daniel 5:29). And we might not have received the benefit of Daniel's prophecy about future events (Daniel 2:36-45). Sometimes, even those who love God, find themselves in a situation that seems hopeless on the surface.

At times, things don't always work out for us Christians, the way we expect them to. But trust God. He has a plan for you, if you don't do something stupid and get in His way! Think about how different things would have been if Joseph had led a rebellion from Potiphar's house. Or what if Moses had given up and returned to Egypt with the slaves? The light of Christ shines brighter in a dark place and in a dark situation. So, trust Him. Remember what Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, knowing He was head-

ing for the cross, "...My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from Me. Yet not as I will, but as You will" (Matthew 26:39 NIV). Sometimes, God is just giving His enemies enough rope to hang themselves on. Remember Gideon. He didn't feel much like a conquering hero. Gideon couldn't believe that God could use him. He said, "...if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all His wonders that our fathers told us about when they said, 'Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us and put us into the hand of Midian. The LORD turned to him and said, 'Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?' 'But Lord,' Gideon asked, 'how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.' The LORD answered, 'I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together'" (Judges 6:13-16 NIV).

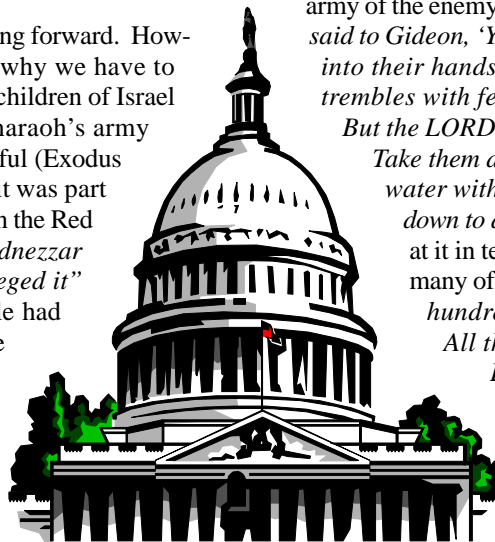
Gideon felt the soldiers he had were no match for the vast army of the enemy, which greatly outnumbered them. "The LORD said to Gideon, 'You have too many men for Me to deliver Midian into their hands... Announce now to the people, Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back...' Ten thousand remained. But the LORD said to Gideon, 'There are still too many men.

Take them down to the water... Separate those who lap the water with their tongues like a dog from those who kneel down to drink'" (Judges 7:2-5 NIV). Gideon was looking at it in terms of human strength. But God knew that too many of Gideon's soldiers would get in His way. "Three hundred men lapped with their hands to their mouths.

All the rest got down on their knees to drink. The LORD said to Gideon, 'With the three hundred men that lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands...' So Gideon sent the rest of the Israelites to their tents but kept the three hundred, who took over the provisions and trumpets of the others..." (Judges 7:6-9 NIV).

God told Gideon to divide the men into three groups and do as He instructed him. "The three companies blew the trumpets and smashed the jars. Grasping the torches in their left hands and holding in their right hands the trumpets they were to blow, they shouted, 'A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!' While each man held his position around the camp, all the Midianites ran, crying out as they fled" (Judges 7:20-21 NIV). It doesn't matter how big or strong the enemy may be. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:35-39 NIV).

In the Lord's service, *Eric and Anne Kaestner*



Unconditional Eternal Security

By Anne Kaestner

With all the many erroneous doctrines around these days, I think that one of the most dangerous is the one that teaches unconditional eternal security. Please don't misunderstand me. I believe in eternal security. I just don't believe in unconditional eternal security. "...*God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you'*" (Hebrews 13:5 NIV). However, Jesus also said, "*I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in Me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned*" (John 15:5-6 NIV). Jesus wasn't talking to the unsaved when He said that. He was speaking to His own disciples. He was comparing Himself to a vine, and His followers were compared to branches. Imagine a grape vine. The purpose of the vine is to produce good, nourishing fruit through its branches. If the vine is in good shape, the branches will be too, unless they are cut off. Fruit is a food. And food is needed to keep us alive. In the same way the vine of Christ keeps His followers spiritually alive. To be spiritually dead is to end up in Hell. It's separation from God, due to your sin. As long as the branches stay attached to the vine they will receive the sap from the vine. The sap is their nourishment that keeps them healthy and strong. Unless they receive that sap from the vine the branches will die.

Jesus said, "*You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in Me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me*" (John 15:3-4 NIV). When you are Born Again (John 3:3) you are clean in the eyes of God. Your sins have been forgiven. And, spiritually speaking, you have been attached to Christ, the way a branch is attached to the vine. Like the branches, you must also remain in Christ, the way the branches remain in the vine. That's the only way you can produce good spiritual fruit. And, Jesus implied that if we don't produce spiritual fruit, we are basically useless and good for nothing. He said that, if we remain in that condition, we would be thrown into the fire. Now that sounds like Hell (Mark 9:47-49, Luke 16:23-26, Revelation 20:11-15). The prophet Isaiah wrote, "*All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away... for You have hidden Your face from us and made us waste away because of our sins*" (Isaiah 64:6-7 NIV).

God is holy. He cannot come in contact with sin, or His very presence destroys that which is sinful, the way fire destroys that which is flammable. "*For our 'God is a consuming fire'*" (Hebrews 12:29 NIV). That's why, in Old Testament times, when the High Priest would enter into the Holy of Holies (Hebrews 9:7), if there was any sin in his life, the Holy Spirit would kill him. It wasn't a matter of God choosing to kill him. It was a natural process, like alcohol coming in contact with germs. It was because sin had not been paid for at that time. Jesus had not died on the cross yet. Now things are different. Now we can come into God's presence directly through the Holy Spirit. However, it is only if we **remain** in Christ. Because He is our only means of doing so.

Being Born Again (John 3:3), also called salvation, is when you repent of your sins and ask God's forgiveness, through Christ, our Savior. At that time, the slate is wiped clean and your past sins are forgiven. But what about future sins? The Bible tells us that people can wander from the faith (1 Timothy 6:10, 21 and 2 Timothy 2:18). Jesus told us the parable of the Sower, who symbolizes the Holy Spirit,

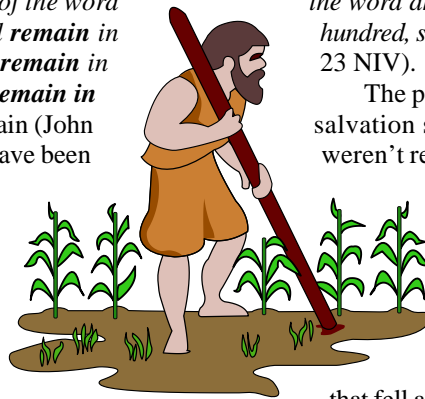
who touches people's hearts and brings them to repentance. However, there are four types of hearts mentioned, and only one fourth of them brings forth good fruit (Galatians 5:22-23) that is pleasing to God. "...*A farmer went out to sow His seed. As He was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown*" (Matthew 13:3-8 NIV).

Jesus gave us the interpretation of the parable. He said, "*When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown*" (Matthew 13:19-23 NIV).

The proponents of the doctrine of unconditional eternal salvation say that those who didn't bring forth good fruit, weren't really saved. However, the only one who didn't receive it was the first one, who didn't understand it. The second one received the seed, so he accepted it, and was Born Again. But his heart was too hard (rocky) to maintain it. God can't do anything with people who will not yield to His will. So, he never brought forth any good fruit. Then there is the one who received the seed that fell among thorns. To receive it is to accept it. However, the things of this world are more important to him than the holy Word of God. He has many worries and distractions in his life, and concerns about money. So, they take priority in his heart. And he brings no good fruit forth either. Then there is the one who received the seed in good soil, meaning a soft, loving heart. And he brings forth much good fruit for the Sower.

Now what is good fruit? It means allowing the Holy Spirit to live in your heart and control your life. He grows the good fruit in you. "...*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control... Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires*" (Galatians 5:22-24 NIV). Thinking that you are permanently saved because some time long ago you asked God to forgive you of your sins, but you have been making your own choices since then, is not enough. Sin separates us from God. Therefore, Jesus emphasized, "Sin no more" (John 15:14, 8:11). So how do we sin no more? We must live according to the Holy Spirit. This is important because Jesus warned His followers, "*Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit*" (Matthew 7:15-17 NIV).

You see, the devil is tenacious. Just because your name is written in God's "Book of Life" doesn't mean that it will stay there. It's conditional! Because Jesus said that only, "*He who overcomes will, like*



them, be dressed in white. I will never **blot out** his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before My Father and His angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Revelation 3:5-6 NIV). Notice that Jesus is especially speaking to the churches. That’s because He wants to make sure you understand what He is saying. Because, the devil doesn’t give up trying to deceive you. And one of his favorite ways is through pulpits. As Paul warned the church leaders in Ephesus, “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which He bought with His own blood. I know that after I leave, savage **wolves** will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and **distort the truth** in order to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:28-30 NIV).

That’s why Paul said that he “...fought wild beasts in Ephesus...” (1 Corinthians 15:32 NIV). He was referring to demon spirits (see 1 Timothy 4:1) in false prophets. Jesus called them “wolves in sheep’s clothing” (Matthew 7:15). They dress like preachers. They give you the impression that they are part of Christ’s flock of sheep. But they are doing the devil’s work. That’s why Paul constantly, contended for the faith (Jude 1:3). He said, “And I will keep on doing what I am doing in order to cut the ground from under those who want an opportunity to be considered equal with us in the things they boast about. For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve” (2 Corinthians 11:12-15 NIV).

The Apostle Peter also spent a lot of his time contending for the faith. Speaking of false prophets, he warned the flock. “For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him. If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. Of them the proverbs are true: ‘A dog returns to its vomit,’ and, ‘A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud’” (2 Peter 2:18-22 NIV). Peter was saying that after you have been Born Again and accepted Christ as your Savior, you can be led astray again and separated from Him.

I once had a discussion with a man who refused to believe that a person can lose their salvation. At one point he became very agitated and wouldn’t let me get a word in to interrupt. He went on a long diatribe. Among other things, he said something like, “I will not believe that someone who loves Jesus with all their heart, and tries the best they can to please Him, can lose their salvation.” What I wanted to say was that I agreed with him. But that’s not what I am talking about. There’s a difference between loving Jesus with all you heart, and taking your salvation for granted. Jesus didn’t wash away our sins so that we can sin with impunity. That’s not loving Him. If we do sin, we must repent of that right away, and He will forgive us (1 John 1:9). However, Jesus said, “...To him who **overcomes**, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God” (Revelation 2:7 NIV). “...He who **overcomes** will not be hurt

at all by the second death” (Revelation 2:11 NIV). “To him who **overcomes and does My will to the end**, I will give authority over the nations—‘He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery’—just as I have received authority from My Father” (Revelation 2:26-27 NIV).

To the lukewarm, who do not overcome, He says, “I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of My mouth. You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with Me. To him who **overcomes**, I will give the right to sit with Me on My throne, just as I overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Revelation 3:15-22 NIV).

Don’t be among the five foolish virgins who went out to meet their Bridegroom and didn’t take enough oil in their lamps (Matthew 25:1-13). “But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with Him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. Later the others also came. ‘Sir! Sir!’ they said. ‘Open the door for us!’ But He replied, ‘I tell you the truth, I don’t know you.’ Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour” (Matthew 25:10-13 NIV). The oil is the Holy Spirit. The lamp is your heart. And don’t make the mistake of thinking that because some religious leader seems to work healings and miracles, that his heart is right with God. Satan can take away the disease he has caused. And he has the power to perform miracles as well. Paul said of these last days, “Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these men oppose the truth—men of depraved minds, who, as far as the faith is concerned, are re-



jected. But they will not get very far because, as in the case of those men, their folly will be clear to everyone” (2 Timothy 3:8-9 NIV). He was talking about the fake miracles that Pharaoh’s magicians performed in order to combat Moses. Jesus said, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but only he who does the will of My Father who is in Heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from Me, you evildoers!’” (Matthew 7:21-23 NIV).

Jesus didn’t say, “By their miracles, you will know them.” Or, “By their knowledge of the Bible you will know them.” Satan knows the Bible very well. He even quoted from it to Jesus (Matthew 4:6). Jesus said, “By their **fruit** you will recognize them...” (Matthew 7:16 NIV). In the days to come, there will be all kinds of things that seem like miracles. The prophesied Antichrist (also called the beast) will be accompanied by a false prophet (Revelation 19:20). So, remember, you were warned ahead of time, “The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed (Continued On Page 4)

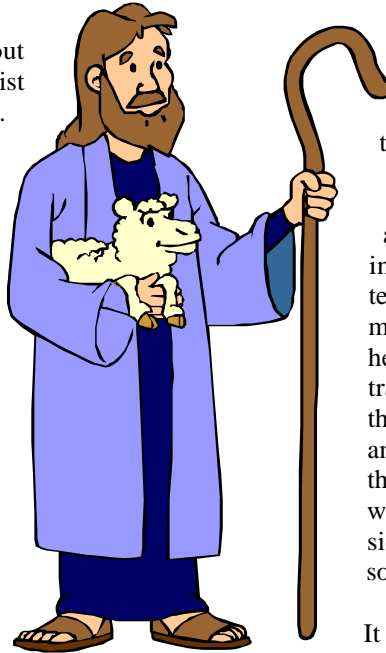
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the truth but have delighted in wickedness” (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12 NIV). God calls His children “sheep.” And sheep will follow a false shepherd if he appears similar to the real thing. Jesus said, “I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. ‘I am the Good Shepherd; I know My sheep and My sheep know Me—just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father—and I lay down My life for the sheep’” (John 10:11-15 NIV)

So, remember what Paul said to Galatians, *“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the One who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!” (Galatians 1:6-9 NIV).*

I have a personal reason to be concerned about the issue of backsliding. I first accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord when I was ten years old. At twelve I received the Baptism in the Holy Spirit (see Acts 19:1-7). Shortly after that, my family moved out of Queens, New York, and away from the church that led me to Christ. My parents bought a house on Long Island and my family started attending a rather lukewarm church that believed in salvation, but wanted nothing to do with the Holy Spirit. I noticed a difference in the people right away. I didn't feel the warmth of fellowship I had experienced before. The new church grew as a result of the original birth, into this world, as those who attended had babies. No longer did I see new “babes in Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:1) coming in among the flock (John 1:12-13). But I was young, and lonely. My family felt at home among the lukewarm. Yet I did not. However, I did get a crush on a young man who took up the collection during Sunday school. He was about my age. And, because he attended our church, I assumed that he wanted to please Jesus, as I did. I was shy and I took a friend of mine to a youth meeting at the church in order to break the ice, so to speak. She met the boy. I'll call him Bob, but that was not his real name. A few days later, Bob called me up on the phone. He wanted my friend's telephone number.

My friend ended up going on a date with him. She asked him what he thought of me and he replied, “Oh Anne. She's too religious.” I think his implication was that I was too boring also. My friend told me what he said, and obviously, I was hurt. It must have been part of Satan's plan to start getting me to backslide, because that's what I did. I was tired of being misunderstood by my family and other teenagers my age. I didn't want to continue to be so lonely. So, I began to change my thinking and slack off on some of my high standards in order to make lukewarm or worldly friends. The years went by and I didn't have the foundation and influence of a church that loved Christ under me. My family continued to go to the same church, but they were just “Sunday Christians.” And my mother and sister would laugh at me when I thought about becoming a missionary. Consequently, my backsliding continued.



When I was twenty I got a crush on a wealthy businessman I met. I was impressed with his expensive clothes and car. Then, when I was talking to him one day, he reminded me of a gold cross I had worn around my neck. It was then that I made the most stupid statement of my life. I replied, “Oh, that doesn't mean anything.” Instantly, I felt a thump in my heart, and a strange spiritual sensation that I ignored at that time. However, retrospectively, I know that was the moment my name had been blotted out of the Lord's book of life (see Revelation 3:5)! Movies and television shows had more influence over me than they should have. I gained new friendships, that lasted awhile, and then ended. I started working as a secretary in New York City. And I got an apartment in Staten Island. However, I still wasn't happy. All the excitement of the big city, and living alone, wore off fast. I got so wrapped up in my new work that I had no time left to read the Bible or pray. However, I was more lonely then than I was before. I moved from one job to another, and nothing seemed to work out for me. Little did I know that the Lord was watching out for me even then.

During those years, I felt like God was way out of reach. No longer did I have the same warm glow of His Spirit in my heart as I had as a child. I was the proverbial lost sheep. I didn't even know if God existed anymore! I felt like such a failure.

Then one day I was sitting on the Staten Island ferry going to work. The ferry was crowded with commuters, as usual. I sat alone that day. My thoughts seemed to drift off to a steep mountainside. A shepherd, dressed in biblical garments, was looking for His little lost lamb that was in danger. Her wool coat was caught on some shrubbery and probably some thorns. The shepherd's feet were in sandals, and bleeding from the sharpness of the terrain as He carefully made His way down the mountain. Finally, He reached the lamb and picked her up in His arms. I suddenly woke up from my trance. I realized that all the other passengers had left the ferry. I was a little shaken from the experience, and slightly embarrassed. The crew watched me by the gangplank as I made my way toward the exit. I was just about to leave when I had a strange compulsion to go back and look at a white paper object that someone had left on a bench.

When I picked it up my eyes filled with tears. It was a church program. On the cover there was a picture of the Good Shepherd holding a little lamb in His arms. There were other similar nudging experiences such as that over the weeks, like the time I was heading home to my apartment when I had a strange compulsion to stop my car and go into a church. That night I attended the service. During the pastor's sermon, he asked the congregation, “What happens when you try to make your own choices without God?” A lady in the crowd said something and the pastor replied, “Say that again Sister. It never works out!” About a week later, I lost my job and was devastated. I decided to go for broke and return to my Shepherd. I threw out everything in my apartment that I felt would offend God, including a novel I had been writing. I set a stack of Cosmopolitan magazines on fire in my kitchen sink, and it is a miracle that they never set my cabinets on fire, as the flames shot up within a half an inch of the wood. It wasn't even scorched. I knelt down, repented of my straying, and reinvited Christ back into my life. The next day I stood on the train platform looking at the snow-covered nursing home across the street, as if I had never seen it before. It looked so beautiful! The joy bubbled up inside of me. That was 40 years ago, and I never want to be without the Lord again!